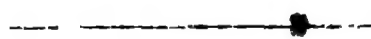
THE

MILLER OF ANGIBAULT.

BY GEORGE SAND.



LONDON:
SIMMS AND M'INTYRE,
PATERNOSTER ROW; AND DONEGALL STREET, BELFAST.

1853.

THE MILLER OF ANGIBAULT.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

THE first hour of the morning sounded from the clock of St. Thomas d'Arquin, when a dark form, little in stature and swift in motion, glided hastily along under the deep, sheltering shadow of the massive wall that bounded one of the beautiful gardens yet to be found in Paris, bordering the left bank of the Seine, and which are so invaluable in the midst of a great capital. The night was warm and serene; the daturas in full blossom exhaled an atmosphere of odour, and rose in their rich luxuriance like spectres robed in white in the full moon's brilliant flood of light. The style of the broad and noble flight of steps which conducted to one of the entrances of the Hôtel de Blanchemont still possessed an air of ancient splendour; and the garden, extensive in its proportions, and in a state of careful cultivation, enhanced the apparent opulence of that silent dwelling, where not a ray of light was gleaming from a single window, to mark it as a human habitation.

This superb moonlight, so unfavourable for the execution of any clandestine purpose, gave some uneasiness to the young female who, clad in her mourning garb, directed her steps through the darkest avenues towards a little door situated at the extremity of the wall. Perhaps her courage might be the greater and her resolution the stronger from the fact, that this was not the first time that she had run the hazard of the discovery of an attachment which henceforth might be sanctioned and legitimate. She had been a month a widow.

Availing herself of the shade formed by a luxuriant group of acacias, she silently pursued her way to a little door which

gave egress to a narrow and unfrequented street. Nearly at the same moment the door opened, and the person with whom an appointment had been made entered quietly and cautiously, and, without uttering a word, followed his beloved one into a little summer pavilion, into which they immediately shut themselves; but influenced by a sentiment of instinctive delicacy, the young Baroness of Blanchemont drew from her pocket a small and delicate apparatus for obtaining light, and having elicited a flame, applied it to a wax taper previously concealed in a corner; while the young man, deferential and respectful in every movement, assisted her as much as was in his power in thus illuminating the interior of that pavilion—only too happy in thus obtaining the power of gazing upon the object of his affections.

The interior of the summer-house was secured from external observation by large wooden shutters A garden-bench, some empty boxes, various implements of horticulture, and the little waxlight, which boasted no richer candelabrum than a broken flower-pot: such were the furnishing and the lighting up of that deserted boudoir, which had served as the voluptuous retreat of some luxurious marchioness of bygone days.

The fair Marcelle wore the chaste and simple costume of a modest widow. Her beautiful golden hair, falling over the folds of her black crape kerchief, was her only ornament The delicacy of her alabaster hands, and the perfect proportions of her feet, encased in satin shoes, were the only indications of her aristocratic birth. Otherwise, she might have been looked upon as a suitable companion of the man who was on his knees before her; she might have been taken for one of the grisettes of Paris, for there are grisettes with the dignity of a queen and the purity of a saint enthroned on their brows.

Henry Lémor had an agreeable person, and was rather intelligent and distinguished than strictly handsome. His black and abundant hair shadowed his pale and melancholy countenance. It was easy to see that he was a true Parisian, strong in determination, though delicate in organization. His simple and unassuming dress spoke only of humble mediocrity; and the unskilful tie of his cravat revealed either the entire absence of all affectation or a fixed habit of mental preoccupation. His brown gloves alone were sufficient to prove that he was not, as the lacqueys of Blanchemont would have said, a man made to be either the lover or the husband of their lady.

These two young people, the one scarcely older than the other, had more than once enjoyed some happy interviews, stolen in the mysterious hours of night; but during the last month, in which they had not seen each other, great anxieties had shadowed the romance of their lives; and now that they met again, Henry Lemor trembled as if in consternation, and Marcelle de Blanchemont appeared frozen with fear. He threw himself upon his knees before her, as if to thank her for having accorded him a last interview, but rose again immediately,

without having uttered a word, and his attitude was constrained and almost frigid.

"At last!" said she, speaking to him with effort, and tendering him a hand which he carried to his lips with an almost convulsive movement, but without the least ray of joy illuminating his countenance.

"He loves me no longer!" was her thought, as, covering her face with her hands, she stood mute and terror-stricken.

"*At last!*" repeated Lémor, "is it not *already* you would say? I ought to have had strength to support a longer separation: forgive me if I have not been able."

"I do not comprehend your meaning," said the young widow, as her hands fell from her face from very heaviness.

Lemor saw that her eyes were bathed in tears, and reproached himself as the cause of her emotion.

"Oh, yes!" he exclaimed, "I am culpable. I see by your grief the remorse that I cause you. These four weeks have appeared so long to me that I have not had the courage to say that the time was too short; and though, unable to endure a longer absence, I wrote to you this morning to ask permission to see you, yet now I am repentant. I blush for my own baseness, and reproach myself for the scruples which I am forcing your conscience to endure and stifle; and when I received your answer, at once so serious and so good, I knew that it was only pity that recalled me to your presence."

"Oh, Henry! you injure me in speaking thus. Is this a jest—a pretext? Why have you desired to see me, if you return with so little happiness and confidence?"

The young man trembled, and suffered himself to fall again at the feet of his mistress. "I prefer pride and reproaches," said he; "your kindness kills me!"

"Henry, Henry!" cried Marcelle, "you have then committed some injury against me. Ah! you have the air of a criminal! I see that you have forsaken and deceived me."

"Neither the one nor the other. To my eternal sorrow, I esteem you, I adore you, I believe in you as in Deity—I can never love but you upon this earth!"

"Ah! well," said the young baroness, laying her hand upon the dark locks of Henry, "is it so great a misfortune to love me thus, if you are loved equally in return? Listen, Henry: you see me free and without reproach. I so little desired the death of my husband, that I never permitted myself to think in what way I should use my liberty if it were restored to me: it is a subject at which our conversation has never glanced; yet you are not ignorant that I love you with passion, although it is the first time that I have had the courage to avow it. But, my friend, why are you so pale? Your hands are icy cold! You are suffering! You frighten me!"

"No, no! Speak on; speak ever thus!" exclaimed Lémor, subdued by emotions at once the most painful and the most delicious.

"You know," continued Madame de Blanchemont, "that I cannot have the scruples and conscientious doubts on your account which you feel on mine. When the bleeding body of my husband was brought back to his home, killed in a duel for a woman on whose account he forgot his wife, I was struck with terror and consternation; and, in sending you that fearful intelligence, in charging you to remain for a time at a distance from me, I thought to fulfil my duty. Oh! if it is a crime to have found that time so very long, your scrupulous obedience has punished me sufficiently. During this month that I have lived in retirement, occupied solely with the care of my child, and in endeavouring to console M. de Blanchemont's parents, I have been examining my own heart, and I cannot charge myself with any great culpability I could not love a man who had never entertained the slightest affection for me, and all that I could do was to respect my own duty. And now Henry, I owe no more to his memory than an external regard to the customs of society. I shall see you in secret, though but seldom, if it must be so, until the end of my mourning; and in a year—in two years, if that is necessary——"

"Ah! well, Marcelle, in two years?"

"You ask me what we shall be one to the other, Henry? I said truly that you no longer love me!"

Henry deserved this reproach so little that it did not affect him. Anxiously absorbed in every word uttered by her he loved, he implored her to proceed.

"If I must speak," she replied, blushing with all the modesty of an ingenuous girl, "should we not then be united, Henry?"

Henry, kneeling at the feet of Marcelle, drooped his head, and remained some moments as if overwhelmed with joy and gratitude; but afterwards he rose suddenly, and his countenance expressed the most intense and profound despair.

"Have you not had the experience of one marriage sufficiently sorrowful?" said he, with a sort of obdurate fierceness, "and would you subject yourself to the same bondage again?"

"You alarm me!" said Madame de Blanchemont, after a moment of terrified silence. "Do you then feel within you the instincts of tyranny? or perhaps it is for yourself that you fear the yoke of eternal fidelity."

"No, no! it is nothing of the kind," said Lémor, despondingly: "that which I fear, that which it is impossible for either you or myself to submit to, you know; but you will not, you cannot comprehend its consequences and extent. Yet this has often been a subject of conversation between us when we little thought that such a discussion should ever personally affect us, and become, to me at least, a question of life or death."

"Is it possible that you should attach yourself to a point so visionary, Henry? What! shall not love itself be able to overcome it? Ah! you love but little, like all other men!" she added with a profound sigh. "Where vice does not wither the

soul, virtue has the same effect; and in every way, base or sublime, you love only yourselves!"

"I am most unhappy in not being able to make myself understood, and in being taken for a wretch when I feel within myself all the heroism of love," he replied with bitterness. "The word may appear to you ambitious, and yet it ought to make you sigh for pity. My sufferings are true, however; they are great, and perhaps beyond my courage."

And Henry burst into tears.

The despondency of the young man was so profound and so sincere that Madame de Blanchemont was terrified. She perceived in these burning tears an invincible refusal of happiness, an eternal adieu to all the illusions of love and youth.

"Oh, my dear Henry!" exclaimed Marcelle, "what injury have you then determined to inflict upon us both! Why this despair, when you are the master of my life—when nothing prevents us from being all to each other, in the face of heaven and of man? Is my child an obstacle between us? Do you not feel sufficient greatness of soul to extend to him a part of that affection which you entertain for me? Do you fear some day having to reproach yourself with forsaking that child of my heart?"

"Your child!" exclaimed Henry with a heavy sigh. "I should have a fear far more serious than that of not loving him enough: I should have the fear of loving him too well, and of not being able to resign him, and, in the course of time, to see his life occupied in interests wholly the reverse of mine. Custom and public opinion would command me to yield him to the world; and I must either tear him from me, or else, in retaining him, render him poor and desolate. No, I could not look upon him with sufficient selfishness and indifference to consent to train him in the habits of a man of his own class. No, no! That and all other things—everything, indeed, both in your position and my own—are insurmountable obstacles. On whichever side I turn, I see only the rage of madness—misery for you, cares for me. It is impossible, Marcelle, for evermore impossible! I love you too well to accept the sacrifice of which you cannot anticipate the results nor measure the extent. You are not aware of them, but I perceive them clearly. You consider me as an undecided and feeble dreamer: I am an obstinate and incorrigible one. Perhaps you have sometimes accused me of affectation; but you have believed that one word of yours could at any time recal me to that which you considered truth and reason. Oh! I am more unhappy than you think, and I love you more than you can comprehend now; but hereafter—yes, hereafter you will thank me in the depth of your heart for having had the resolution to be unhappy alone."

"Hereafter! And why? And wherefore? Tell me."

"Hereafter, I say, when you shall rouse yourself from the dark and accursed dream into which I have enticed you; when

you return to the world and partake in its soft and sweet intoxications; in short, when you shall be no longer an angel, but when you have descended upon earth again."

"Yes, yes, when I shall be seared with egotism and corrupted with flattery! That is what you would say—that is what you would augur of me! In your savage pride you believe me incapable of embracing your ideas and comprehending your feelings. However painful it may be to say it, you find that I am not worthy of you, Henry."

"What you are saying is fearful, madam, and this struggle cannot be much longer supported. Let me fly, for we cannot now comprehend either each other or ourselves!"

"You leave me thus?"

"No, I never leave you. I go, indeed, far from your presence, to contemplate you and to adore you in the secret depths of my heart! I go to suffer eternally, but with the hope that you will forget me. I go with remorse for having desired to win your affections, but with the consolation of not having basely abused them."

Madame de Blanchemont had risen to detain Henry, but she fell back, overcome, upon her seat.

"Why, then, have you desired to see me?" she demanded, in a cold and offended tone, seeing him preparing to depart.

"Yes, yes!" he exclaimed, "you have reason to reproach me; but this is a last injury on my part. I felt the desire, and I yielded to the necessity, of seeing you once again. I hoped I should have found you changed towards me; your silence led me to believe it: I was consumed with grief, and I thought I should gather strength from beholding your indifference to effect my cure. Why did I come? Why do you love me? Am I not the basest, the most ungrateful, the most barbarous, the most hateful of men? But it is better that you see me thus, that you may be thoroughly convinced that there is nothing in me to regret. If my feelings constrained me to seek this last interview, you will reap from it the benefit of knowing me as I am."

The manner of Henry Lémor was wild and agitated. His countenance, ordinarily distinguished by a tone of pure and simple gravity, had now lost all self-control. His voice, generally so soft and sympathising, had become so low and tremulous as to be almost inaudible. Marcelle plainly perceived the acuteness of his sufferings, but her own were so poignant that she was unable to exert herself for their mutual consolation. She remained pale and silent, her hands clasped, her person fixed and rigid as a statue. Henry had reached the door to depart, but, turning to take a last farewell look, and seeing her thus stricken, he returned and fell at her feet, which he covered with his kisses and his tears.

"Adieu!" he exclaimed, "most beautiful, most pure of women—most faithful in friendship, most devoted in love! May you find a heart worthy of you; may you meet with one

who will love you as I have loved, and whose lot may be exempt from all that may discourage the happiness of life; may you be blessed and happy, without experiencing the struggles of an existence such as mine; and, if there still remains in the world in which you live any remnant of holy truth and human charity, reanimate it with your own divine breath, and obtain favour from God for your class and your age, which you alone are worthy of redeeming!"

With these words Lémor precipitately departed, forgetting that he left Marcelle to despair. In truth, he seemed followed by the Furies.

Madame de Blanchemont remained for a long time as if in a state of stupefaction. At length she returned to her own apartment, and walked heavily and gloomily backwards and forwards until the first beams of the morning broke, without shedding a tear or breaking the silence of the night by breathing a single sigh.

It would be boldness to affirm that this widow of two-and-twenty, beautiful, rich, and celebrated in the world for her grace, her talent, and her spirit, was not to a certain degree humiliated and indignant to find her hand refused by a man without birth, fortune, or reputation. It might not be true courage, so much as offended pride, which supported her under the first pressure of the blow; but it was not long before the true nobility of her sentiments suggested to her more serious reflections, and for the first time she was plunged in profound deliberation on the course of her own life and the lives of those by whom she was surrounded. She recalled all that Henry had said during their various interviews, when love between them was but a hopeless question; and was astonished at herself not to have received, as serious principles, sentiments which she had considered as merely the romantic ideas of an austere mind. After a time she began to judge him with the candour which a generous disposition must always reveal, even in the midst of the most violent emotions of the heart. As the hours of the night passed on, and the distant clocks echoed each other in their clear and silvery voices through the great sleeping city, Marcelle arrived at that clearness of perception which a long vigil usually brings to sorrow. Educated in widely different principles from those of Lémor, she had yet been predestined to share the love of the plebeian, and to take refuge in it from all the griefs and languor of her aristocratic life. She was one of those powerful and impassioned souls who carry in their own organization the necessity of self-devotion, and who can conceive no other happiness than that which they bestow. Unfortunate in her domestic life, tired of the world, she abandoned herself, with all the romantic ardour of a young girl, to the sentiments which she soon learned to look upon as her religion. If in her childhood her devotion was warm and ardent, so now at a later date her love had become a passion. These

feelings gave strength to each other, for religion would consecrate love by binding it in indissoluble ties, as soon as the freedom to receive those ties existed. She had thought with joy of sacrificing both those material interests, so prized by the world, and the narrow prejudices of birth, which had never deceived her judgment. She contemplated doing things which the world would either laugh at or condemn; but she had not foreseen that her plans would fail, and that the pride of the plebeian would reject almost as an affront the sacrifice she meditated.

Enlightened in a moment by the fear, the grief, the opposition of Lémor, Marcelle recalled to her dismayed mind all the glimmerings which she had caught of that social crisis which agitated the age. The women of our times no longer find themselves strangers in the highest regions of thought; and henceforth all, to the extent of their capacity, may, without incurring ridicule, or being charged with affectation, read every day under every form of periodical or romance, philosophy, politics, and poetry, official discourses or familiar conversation, in the great, sorrowful, diffuse, yet contradictory, book of actual life. She therefore well knew, as we all do, that the present dulness and sickliness of society are the result of a struggle between the past which draws us back, and the future, which impels us forward She perceived the dawning of great light, and foresaw an impending contest more or less distant. She was not of a pusillanimous nature; she had no fear, and did not shut her eyes on that which was approaching. The regrets, the complaints, the terrors, and recriminations of her great relations had actually had the effect of making her wearied and disgusted with the feeling of fear. Youth cannot curse the time of its blossoming, nor those years so charming and so cherished, though charged with storms and tempests. The tender and courageous Marcelle assured herself, we may smile at the storm and the thunder, under the shelter of the nearest little wood, with the being whom we love. The struggle which could only menace her wordly interests appeared to her therefore but a jest. "Of what importance is ruin—exile—imprisonment?" she asked herself, when she heard of the impending terrors hovering over the pretended happiness of the age. "They can never banish love; and for me, thanks to heaven! I love a man so humble that he may be spared."

Only she had not yet reflected, that she might be wounded in her affections by that dark and mysterious struggle which would assuredly accomplish itself in defiance of every apparent obstacle—a struggle of sentiments and ideas which must henceforth imperatively be carried on; and Marcelle found herself precipitated in an instant into the midst of these dreamlike illusions. The intellectual and moral war declared between the opposite classes imbued them with contrary passions and opinions; and Marcelle found a sort of irreconcilable

enemy in the man who adored her. Terrified at first at this discovery, she familiarised herself with it by degrees, and found that it suggested to her new designs, still more generous and romantic than even that which she had been cherishing for the last month; and at the end of her long walk across her silent and deserted apartments, she attained the calmness which usually follows a determined purpose, though the resolution she had formed was one which she alone could contemplate without a smile of wonder or of pity.

All this passed recently—perhaps as lately as the last year.

CHAPTER II.

THE JOURNEY.

In consequence of Marcelle having married her cousin, she still retained the name of Blanchemont, which she had previously borne. The estate and the chateau of Blanchemont formed a part of her inheritance. The land was of importance, but the house, abandoned for more than a hundred years to the occupation of those who farmed the property, was no longer habitable even for them, threatening, as it did, to fall into a total ruin, and the expense of renovation being too great to be undertaken. Mademoiselle de Blanchemont being an orphan heiress, brought up in a convent at Paris, and marrying very young, had never been initiated by her husband into the management of her own affairs, nor had she ever even visited the domains of her ancestors. Influenced by new feelings, she now formed the resolution of commencing a pilgrimage by going first to Blanchemont, with a view of ultimately establishing herself there, if such a residence could be made to accord with her views. She was not ignorant of the dilapidated state of her castle, but this was one reason for her casting an eye of preference on this abode. The embarrassed state in which her husband had left his affairs, and the apparent disorder of her own, served as a pretence for undertaking a journey which she spoke of as being likely to occupy only a few weeks, but to which, in her secret thoughts, she assigned no precise limits, her real intention being to give up Paris, and the sort of life to which she was there subjected.

Fortunately for these projects, there were no members of her family who might feel it incumbent upon them to undertake the duty of giving her their company and assistance. Being an only child, she was not placed in a position to be compelled to decline the protection of a sister, or an elder brother. The parents of her husband, feeling alarmed at the embarrassed state in which he had left his affairs—which the most prudent management could alone hope to arrange—were, at the same

time, delighted and surprised to see a woman of two-and-twenty years of age, who had never before shown the least taste or aptitude for business, form the resolution of arranging all the necessary concerns herself, and of going to see with her own eyes, the real condition of her property. They had, however, some objections to make to her undertaking such a journey alone with her child. They wished her to be accompanied by her steward, and they feared that the child would suffer from a journey undertaken when the heat was so extreme. Marcelle replied to the elder Blanchemonts, her father and mother-in-law, that a long *tête-à-tête* journey with an old man of law, was not exactly of a nature to soften the weariness of the task which she had imposed upon herself—that she should find among the provincial solicitors instructions more to the purpose, and advice better adapted to the locality; in short, that it was not so very difficult a thing to settle accounts and renew leases with farmers. Then, as for the child, the air of Paris was only rendering him still more and more debilitated, while the country exercise and sunshine would soon restore him. At last Marcelle, being perfectly aware of the obligations imposed upon her in the character of guardian of her son, hazarded an adroit stroke to triumph over the obstacles which she had foreseen and prepared for, during the night's vigil which we have reported in the preceding chapter. She was still in a great measure ignorant of the liabilities resting on the succession of the Blanchemont estate, whether the tenants had made any considerable advances of their rents, and whether or not the property was mortgaged. It was her duty to go and inquire into all these things, to investigate them herself in order to ascertain on what footing she ought henceforth to live, so that she might not compromise the future inheritance of her son. She spoke so wisely of these things which, in reality, interested her very little, that at the end of a dozen hours she won the victory, and brought all the family to approve and allow her resolution. Her love for Henry dwelt so deep and secretly within her heart, that not a suspicion of it arose to disturb the confidence of her family.

Supported by an unaccustomed activity, and by an enthusiastic hope, Marcelle slept but little better than on the night which followed her last interview with Lémor. Her dreams were wild and extravagant, sometimes ludicrous, sometimes painful. Wearied with her unquiet pillow, she rose at the first dawn of day.

And now the glorious sun had risen in the clear, blue sky, and its bright beams piercing through the drapery of the curtains made that sanctuary appear enchanting, which in bygone days Madame de Blanchemont had herself decorated with such exquisite taste, and which now recalled so many soft and tender recollections. It was there that, flying from the world, she had buried herself among books and dreams in the midst of the rich perfume of a luxury of flowers of unequalled

beauty, such as can be found only in Paris, and which in the present day form an essential part in the arrangements of an elegant lady. It had been her pleasure to adorn and embellish that retreat, to render it poetical, and she had attached herself to it as to a mysterious asylum, when the sorrows of her life, and the pride of her soul might be appeased in prayer and contemplation. Walking through those apartments she gazed around with a long look of affection, and then pronounced the form of an eternal adieu to all those mute witnesses of her most private life—a life as retired as that of the flower which loves not even the gaze of the sun, but droops its head under the foliage, loving best the freshness and the shade.

"Retreat of my heart, adorned according to the dictates of my own taste, I have loved you!" thought she, "but I can no longer love you, for you have been the scene and the encourager of the slothfulness of wealth. You could only henceforth represent to my eyes all that separates me from Henry! I could therefore never more look upon you but with distaste and bitterness. I leave you before I hate you. Severe Madonna, thou wouldst cease to protect me! Pure and spotless mirrors, you would detest my image! Beautiful flowers, you shall have for me no longer either grace or odour!"

After having for a time indulged in these reflections before writing to Lémor, as she had resolved on doing, she stole quietly to the bed of her boy to contemplate and bless his slumbers. The sight of that pale child, in whom precocious intelligence had been developed at the expense of physical power, excited in her emotions of passionate tenderness. She spoke to him in her heart, as if he were able in his sleep to hear and understand the emotions of her maternal solicitude.

"Rest in peace," said she, addressing him internally: "I do not love *him* more than I love you. Be not jealous. If he were not the best and most estimable of men I would not give him to you for a father. Angelic child, you are ardently and faithfully loved! Sleep in peace, for we shall never part!"

Marcelle, bathed in delicious tears, returned to her chamber, and wrote the few following lines to Lémor:—

You are right, and I comprehend you. I am not worthy of you now, but I have determined to become so. I am undertaking a long journey, but do not be anxious on my account, and love me still. In a year, to the very day, you shall receive a letter from me. Arrange your affairs so as to be at liberty to come to me wherever I may summon you. If you should then believe me not to be sufficiently altered you shall give me another year—one year, two years, with hope, amounts almost to happiness, for two beings who, for a long time, lived without hope.

This note was sent early in the morning, but M. Lémor was not to be found. He had departed in the night, and it was not known where he had gone nor for how long a time. He

had left his humble lodgings. Still there was an assurance that her letter would reach him, because one of his friends was commissioned to come every day to receive his correspondence and forward it to him.

Two days after, Madame de Blanchemont, with her son, her *femme de chambre*, and one domestic, were travelling across the wilderness of Sologne.

Having left Paris eighty leagues behind, our travellers found themselves almost in the centre of France, and slept in a town the nearest to Blanchemont, although that was still five or six leagues distant, and in the heart of the country. Notwithstanding all the new roads which have been opened to assist the freedom of communication, there is so little animation in the intercourse, that even at a short distance from the required place, it is difficult to obtain from the inhabitants any certain information of the localities. Everybody knows perfectly well the way to the town or the district whither his affairs call him from time to time; but if you ask the way to the village or the farm, which is but a league beyond, the answer will probably be, "There are so many ways—and they are all so much alike!" Rising early in the morning to prepare for the departure of their mistress, the attendants of Madame de Blanchemont could not obtain from the innkeeper, nor from his servants, nor yet of the country travellers who were sojourning there and who were still half asleep, any certain information respecting the road to Blanchemont Nobody knew exactly where it was situated One came from Montluçon, another knew the Château-Meillant, all had travelled a hundred times over Ardentes and Châtre, but none of them knew Blanchemont further than by name.

"I have heard of it," said one "I know the farmer who lives at Blanchemont, but I have never been there. It is a long way off. at least four leagues."

"Faith," said another, "I have seen the Blanchemont cattle at Berthenoux fair not longer ago than last year, and I talked to M Bricolin the farmer there, just as I am talking to you now. Yes, yes, I know Blanchemont, but I don't know where it is to be found"

The servant, like all inn servants, knew nothing of the surrounding neighbourhood: like all inn servants, too, she had been but a little time in that place

The lady's maid and the man-servant, accustomed to follow their mistress to those brilliant residences, known more than twenty leagues around, and situated in civilized countries, began to think themselves in the depths of Sahara. Their faces lengthened and their self-love suffered cruelly in having to ask without success the way to a house which they were going to honour with their presence

"Is it a den—a soldiers' barrack?" said Suzette with an air of scorn to Lapierre.

"It is the palace of Corybantes," replied Lapierre, who had admired in his youth a melodrama which had had great success, entitled, "The Château de Corisande," and who clumsily applied that name to every ruin that he met with.

At last a ray of light struck the stable-boy.

"We have a man sleeping up above who can tell you all about it, for it is his business to travel all over the country both day and night. It is Grand-Louis, otherwise called the Long Miller."

"Go and fetch the Long Miller," said Lapierre with an air of dignity: "it seems that his bedchamber is situated at the top of a ladder."

The Long Miller descended from his loft, stretching his huge limbs. Seeing the athletic structure of his imposing person, Lapierre gave up his facetious superiority, and interrogated him with politeness. The Miller proved to be the most able of instructors; but, after the information which he gave Suzette, she judged it necessary to introduce him to Madame de Blanchemont, who was taking her chocolate in an apartment with little Edward, and who, far from partaking in the consternation of her people, was rejoiced to hear that Blanchemont was a lost and almost undiscoverable country.

This alarming specimen of the inhabitants, who presented himself that moment before Marcelle, was six feet high—a remarkable stature in a country where the men are generally below the middle size. He was proportionately robust, well-made, easy in his motions, and possessing a striking person. The young girls in his own neighbourhood called him "*Handsome* Miller," and this epithet was also quite as well merited as the other of "*Long*." After he had wiped away the flour, which generally covered his face, with the back of his sleeve, he discovered a complexion of the most beautiful tone—brown, sunny, animated. His features were regular, though, like his limbs, on a large scale; his eyes black and well-shaped; his teeth bright and dazzling; his hair curling and undulating, and surrounding a square-shaped and well-developed forehead, which bespoke more of ingenuity and good sense than of the ideal of poetry. He wore a large dark-blue blouse, with trousers of grey cloth; and his description is soon ended if we mention his iron-tipped shoes, and a heavy stick of the wood of the service-tree, terminated by a weighty knob of the branch which formed it, which made it into a species of club.

He entered with a confidence which might have been taken for effrontery, if the softness of his clear blue eyes, and the smile of his large, vermilion mouth, had not borne witness that openhearted sincerity, kindness, and a sort of careless philosophy, formed the depths of his character.

"Good morning, madam," said he, touching his shabby grey hat with its wide brim, but without exactly lifting it from his head; for while the old peasant of past days is obsequious, and disposed to salute all who are better dressed than himself, those

who date after the Revolution are remarkable for the tenacity with which they keep their heads covered. "I hear that you wish me to tell you the way to Blanchemont."

Marcelle had not seen the Long Miller enter, and his powerful and sonorous voice made her start. She turned quickly round, a little surprised at first at his unbecoming attitude; but such is the privilege of beauty of person, that after mutually examining each other, the young miller and the young lady soon forgot the mistrust which difference of rank always at first inspires: only Marcelle, seeing him disposed to assume a tone of familiarity, believed it to be her duty to recal him to the respect which she considered due to her sex, by practising great politeness on her own side.

"I am greatly obliged to you for your kindness," replied she, bowing to him; "and I request you to tell me, sir, if there is a passable carriage-road from here to Blanchemont."

The Long Miller, without being invited, had already taken a chair to sit down; but hearing himself addressed as "sir," he comprehended with quick acuteness that his business was with an amiable and respectable lady, and that he was alone in her presence. Therefore, instead of seating himself, he softly lifted the hat from his head, and leaned upon the back of the chair as if to support himself.

"There is an adjoining road," said he, "where people need not be overturned if they take care. The only thing is to follow it without turning into any other. I will direct your postillon. But the best way would be to take a *patache* from here, for the late rains and storms have done a great deal of damage in the Black Valley, and I am afraid that the little wheels of your carriage could not get through the ruts. Perhaps they might, but I would not answer for it."

"I see that these ruts are not very agreeable, and that it will be more prudent to follow your advice. You are sure that we could not be overturned in a *patache*?"

"Oh! there is no fear of that, madam."

"I am not afraid for myself, but for this little child. I must be prudent on his account."

"It would be a pity to hurt him," said the Long Miller, approaching the young Edward with an air of sincere kindness: "the little fellow is so delicate and pretty."

"He is very delicate—is he not?" said Marcelle with a smile.

"He is not strong, indeed, but he is as pretty as a girl. So, then, you are coming into the country to us, sir?"

"Stop, you great man!" cried Edward, catching hold of the Miller, who had bent towards him, "and make me touch the ceiling."

The Miller took the child, and lifting him above his head, walked the length of the room, suffering him to touch the black and smoky cornice.

"Take care!" exclaimed Madame de Blanchemont, a little

alarmed at the easy way in which this rustic Hercules handled her child.

"Do not fear," replied Grand-Louis; "I would rather break all the *alochons* of my mill than a finger of this little gentleman."

The word "*alochon*" amused the child, who continued to repeat it, laughing, but without comprehending it.

"You do not understand that," said the Miller; "but it means the little wings, the bits of wood, that are placed upon the wheel, and which the motion of the water forces round. I will show them to you if ever you pass by our way."

"Yes, yes! *alochon!*" said the child, bursting into laughter, and laying himself down in the arms of the Miller.

"The little rogue is merry," said Grand-Louis, replacing him in his chair. "My business calls me away, madam. Is this all that I can do to serve you?"

"Yes, my friend," replied Marcelle, whose kindness of heart overcame her reserve.

"Oh! I ask nothing better than to be your friend," energetically replied the Miller, with a look that sufficiently expressed that, from a person less young and less beautiful, such familiarity would not have been to his taste.

"That is good," thought Marcelle, blushing and smiling at the same time, "and I must take it as a warning." And she added—

"Adieu, sir. Without doubt we shall meet again, for you are an inhabitant of Blanchemont."

"A near neighbour. I am the Miller of Angibault, about a league from your château; for I believe you are the Lady of Blanchemont"

Marcelle had charged her people not to betray her *incognito*. She desired to travel through the country unknown; but she saw very well, by the Miller's manner, that her condition as a landed proprietor did not excite so much sensation as she had feared. A landlord who does not reside on his estate is a stranger in whom no one is interested. The farmer who represents him, and transacts all the business of his property, is a much greater personage.

Notwithstanding the plans which she had formed, of setting off at an early hour and reaching Blanchemont before noon, Marcelle was obliged to pass the greater part of the day at that village inn.

All the village conveyances were absent on account of a great fair being held in the neighbourhood, and they were obliged to wait the return of the first which should happen to come. It was not till three o'clock in the afternoon that Suzette brought the tidings to her mistress, delivered in a lamentable tone, that a species of osier basket, horrible and disgraceful, was the only vehicle at her disposal.

To the great astonishment and wonder of the maid, Madame de Blanchemont did not hesitate to accept the accommoda-

tion. Taking with her a few packages of real necessity, she consigned the rest of her luggage to the care of her host of the inn, and departed in the classical *patache*, that respectable witness of the simplicity of our forefathers, becoming every day more rare even in the roads of the Black Valley. The one which it was Marcelle's ill chance to meet with was of the most indigenous construction, and of an antiquity not to be contemplated without respect. It was long and shallow like a coffin, and no species of spring regulated its motion. The wheels, being as high as the head, were thus enabled to brave the muddy ditches which furrow the travelling routes, and which the Miller had been willing to describe as mere ruts, influenced no doubt by national vanity. In fact, the hood itself was but of woven osier basket-work, roughly plastered in the inside with a mixture of mud and hair, from which every jolt of the vehicle brought down some detached portions upon the heads of the travellers within A little self-willed horse, lean and spirited, drew this rustic vehicle tolerably well; and the *patachon*, that is to say, the driver, sat on one side upon the shaft, his legs hanging down; and as our forefathers found that the most convenient way of getting into a carriage was to bring a chair rather than to embarrass the limbs by a footboard, perhaps he was the least stifled and the least uncomfortable of the whole caravan. There perhaps still exist in our country two or three vehicles of this sort among the rich old country-people, who will not depart from the ways of their ancestors, and who maintain that carriages suspended by springs have the effect of cramping their limbs.

However, the journey was rather more endurable while they followed the high-road. The driver was a boy of fifteen, red-haired, flat-nosed, impudent, fool-hardy, not at all careful of his horse, but stimulating its spirit by all the oaths in his rich vocabulary; and without the least respect for the presence of the ladies, he amused himself by exhausting the energy of the spirited pony, who had never in his life tasted oats, and whom the sight of the surrounding verdure served to excite and animate. But when at last he was surrounded by an arid land, he began to hang his head with an air of discontent and sullenness, and to drag his burthen on with a sort of rage, without the slightest regard to the ruggedness of the way, which imparted to the carriage a very miserable rolling and jolting motion.

CHAPTER III.

THE MENDICANT.

THINGS were much worse when they got out of the sandy roads and descended into the low grass lands of the Black Valley. While on the borders of the sterile plain over which they had passed, Madame de Blanchemont had admired the vast and imposing landscape which had unrolled itself beneath her feet, the extent of which was bounded only by the horizon, melting into the pale violet of the evening sky, and girdled with the golden rays of the setting sun. All France can scarcely boast a fairer site. Notwithstanding, the vegetation, viewed in detail, does not possess a great luxuriance. No rivers of importance flow through this part of the country; and the inhabitants are so few that the sun does not shine on many slated roofs. We have no picturesque mountains, nothing striking, nothing wonderful in this scene of peaceful nature, but a grand development of cultivated land in an infinite division of fields and meadows, of copse and underwood, and of wide pasture-lands, presenting an endless variety of outline and shade in a general harmony of deep-toned verdure, verging upon blue. A mixture of enclosed plantations, of cottages half buried in their own orchards, of rows of lofty poplars, of tufted pastures in the depths, of fields of a paler green, and hedges of a brighter colouring, contrasting with the dark shades of the neighbouring masses. In short, in the extent of fifty square leagues, which the eye embraces at a single glance from the heights on which the cottages of Labreuil or of Corlay are situated, a view presents itself at once vast and imposing. But our travellers very soon lost sight of this magnificent panorama. Once involved in the intricacies of the Black Valley, the whole scene was changed, as they alternately ascended and descended through the half-hidden roads winding among the woods; they did not, indeed, coast along precipices, but the roads were precipices of themselves. The sun sinking behind the trees imparted to them a peculiar physiognomy, at once wild and graceful. There were mysterious shadows flitting through the dark thickets, and tracks of an emerald green which conducted to impassable stagnant morasses, or to rapid turnings, which it is impossible to ascend in any carriage, and which, while they afford continual enchantment to the imagination, are replete with real danger to those who adventure in any other way than on foot, or at most on horseback, among these capricious and perfidious, but seducing windings.

While the sun was above the horizon, the red-headed simpleton managed matters tolerably well. He followed the way that was most beaten, and consequently the roughest, but also the safest. He crossed two or three streams, following the traces of the cart-wheels imprinted on their banks; but matters changed when the sun had set, and night came suddenly on in those secluded, hollow ways, and the last peasant to whom he had addressed himself answered, with an air of indifference—

"Go on, go on; you have only a short league to go, and it is all good road."

Now this was the sixth peasant in about the last two hours who had told them that they had but a short league to go, and the road, always so very good, was such that the horse was exhausted, and the travellers were at the end of their patience. Marcelle herself began to fear that they should be overturned; for if the driver and his pony required broad day to pick out their way, and that, too, with the utmost care, it was impossible that in the depth of night they could avoid the chasms which rendered the country at once so dangerous and so picturesque, and which, offering an instantaneous interruption to the traveller, may precipitate him in a moment down ten or a dozen perpendicular feet. The boy had never before penetrated so far into the Black Valley, and he grew impatient, swearing like one possessed every time he was obliged to retrace his steps to recover the road. He complained of hunger and thirst, lamented the fatigue of his horse while beating him most cruelly, and gave himself the airs of a town-bred youth, consigning to destruction the barbarous country and all its stupid inhabitants.

More than once, finding the road precipitous but dry, Marcelle and her attendants had alighted from their vehicle; but they could not walk for five minutes without reaching one of those numerous hollows filled with water from the natural springs, which, being unable to escape thus, formed themselves into pools, impossible for a delicate woman to pass over on foot. The Parisian Suzette said that she preferred being overturned to leaving her shoes in the mire; and Lapierre, who had passed his life in pumps on polished floors, was so very awkward, that Madame de Blanchemont did not dare to allow him to carry her child.

The common manner of the peasant when he is asked the way, no matter where, is to answer—"Go straight on—always go straight on!" which is simply a pun, a kind of quibble, which signifies that we must walk straight upon our legs, for there is not a single straight road in the Black Valley. The numberless ravines formed by the Indre, the Vauvre, the Couarde, the Gourdon, and a hundred other streams, which change their names in their course, and which have never been humiliated under the yoke of bridge or causeway of stepping-stones, force travellers to take a thousand turnings and windings to find a fordable way, so that they are often

obliged to turn their backs on the very spot which in reality they are labouring to approach.

Having reached, at a meeting of roads surmounted by a cross, a sinister spot, which the imagination of the peasantry always peoples with demons, sorcerers, and fantastic animals, our embarrassed travellers addressed themselves to a mendicant who was sitting on the *dead man's stone*, and who cried to them in a monotonous voice, "Charitable souls, have pity on a poor unfortunate being!"

The massive proportions of this very old, but still very robust man, who was armed with an enormous stick, would have rendered the idea of an attack hand to hand a little discouraging. The waning light did not allow them to perceive the severe character of his countenance; but there was, in the cadence of his harsh voice, something more imperious than supplicatory. His dejected attitude, and his dirty and ragged garb, contrasted strongly with the singular freak of fancy which made him wear an old *bouquet*, and a faded ribbon in his hat.

"My friend," said Marcelle, giving him some money, "direct us to Blanchemont, if you know the way."

The beggar gravely continued to recite a Latin *Ave Maria*, which he had designedly commenced, instead of replying.

"Answer at once!" said Lapierre to him; "you can mutter your paternosters afterwards."

The mendicant turned his head towards the lacquey with an air of contempt, and continued his prayers.

"Don't talk to that man," said the red-headed driver; "he is an old beggar who beats about the country, and never knows where he is going. He is met everywhere, but nobody can find any sense in him."

"The way to Blanchemont?" said the beggar at last, when he had finished his prayer; "you are not in the way, my children. You must go back, and take the first turn to the right."

"Are you certain?" said Marcelle.

"I have gone that way more than six hundred times. If you don't believe me, do as you like; it's all the same to me."

"He appears sure of what he says," said Marcelle to her driver. "Listen to him. What interest can he have in deceiving us?"

"Bah! the pleasure of making mischief!" replied the boy, gloomily. "I have my suspicions of that man."

Marcelle insisted upon following the advice of the mendicant, and their vehicle was soon plunged in a narrow track, particularly steep and winding.

The horse stumbled and the boy swore at every step. "I know," he muttered, "that the old, sullen fellow has done it on purpose to make us lose our way."

"We must go on," said Marcelle, "since it is impossible for us to return."

A little further on, the road became almost impassable, but it was too narrow for turning the carriage round, two splendid hedges almost enclosing them. After performing miracles of strength and devotion, the little horse reached the bottom, and paused under a mass of old oak trees, which seemed to be on the skirt of the wood. The road widened suddenly, and they saw themselves in front of a great piece of stagnant water which gave little promise of being fordable. Notwithstanding its formidable appearance, the driver ventured into it; but having reached the centre, the vehicle began to sink so much as to throw them all on one side. This was the last exploit of the poor Bucephalus. The *patache* sank on one side as deep as the axle of the wheel, and the horse, falling down, broke his traces. He was now unyoked and quite detached from the carriage. Lapierre was in the water on his knees groaning like a man in agony; and when he had helped the *patachon* out of this dilemma, all their efforts were vain (neither of them was very strong) to extricate the carriage. At last the boy leaped quickly on his horse, and, swearing against the sorcerer mendicant, set off at a brisk trot, promising to go and seek for aid, but in a tone and with a manner which foretold very significantly that he should very little reproach himself if he left the travellers to their fate till the next day.

Fortunately the vehicle had not been overturned; although all to the one side, it could still be occupied; and Marcelle endeavoured to arrange things within, so that her little son might sleep more commodiously; for Edward had for a long time been asking for his supper and his bed; and some dainties kept in reserve in Suzette's pocket having appeased his hunger, he was very desirous of commencing his slumbers. Madame de Blanchemont, judging that the little driver would not be in great haste to return, in case he found a good lodging, thought it would be better that Lapierre should go and search the environs, and try to discover some one of the thatched cottages, so closely concealed among the umbrageous trees, and so thoroughly silent and shut up after the setting of the sun, making it almost necessary that they should be touched to be seen; and to take one of these by assault, and obtain hospitality at an hour which the habits of the country-people rendered unseasonable. Old Lapierre had but one anxiety, which was to find a fire, that he might dry his feet and save himself from the rheumatism. He himself, therefore, warmly seconded the plan, after thoroughly convincing himself that the vehicle, which was leaning against the trunk of an old uprooted willow, was not in danger of sinking deeper, or being more entirely overturned.

The most disconsolate of the party was Suzette, who had great fears of thieves, wolves, and serpents—three plagues unknown in the Black Valley, but which are never out of the

thoughts of a *femme de chambre* in travelling. However, the cheerful indifference of her mistress prevented her from yielding herself up to noisy terror; so, drawing herself up as she best could in the corner of the vehicle, she abandoned herself to silent tears.

"Ah! well—what is the matter, Suzette?" asked Marcelle when she perceived this.

"Alas! madam," she replied, sobbing, "don't you hear the croaking of the frogs? They will come upon us, and fill the carriage ——"

"And devour us, without doubt!" exclaimed Marcelle, bursting into a laugh.

And certainly the green-liveried dwellers of the swamp, silenced and alarmed for a few moments by the disaster of the horse and the clamour from the vehicle, had recommenced their psalmody. They heard also the barking and howling of dogs, but so far off that it afforded them little room to hope for prompt assistance. The moon had not yet risen, but the brightness of the stars was reflected in the large expanse of water, which had resumed its limpidity, and a warm breeze breathed through the tall reeds which rose in thick tufts around its margin.

"Come, Suzette," said Marcelle, who had already yielded herself up to a poetic reverie, "we are not so badly off as I should have expected in a swamp; and, if you were inclined, you could sleep as well here as in your bed."

"She must have lost her senses," thought Suzette, "at finding herself in such a situation."

"Oh, heavens! madam," she cried, after a moment's silence, "it seems to me as if I heard the howling of a wolf! Are we not in the middle of a wood?"

"I believe the wood is only a willow-tree, and the wolf which you hear howling is only a man singing. If we could make him hear as well on our side, he might help us to reach *terra firma*."

"And if he should be a thief?"

"In that case he is a very kind thief, who sings on purpose to warn us to be upon our guard. Listen, Suzette! Without any jest, he comes this way. I hear his voice drawing near."

In truth, the sound of a rich and powerful voice, full of manly harmony, uncultivated and unacquainted with any of the rules of art, hovered about the silent fields, accompanied as if in measure, by the slow and regular footfalls of a horse. But the voice was yet far distant, and there was nothing that led to the belief that the singer was travelling in the direction of the swamp, which was the less likely, as they believed it to be impassable. When the song was finished, either the horse was travelling over the grass, or the villager had turned another way, but they heard nothing more to give sign of his approach.

At that moment, Suzette, abandoned to her terrors, saw a dark shadow gliding silently along the edge of the marsh,

which, from its reflection on the water, appeared gigantic. She suffered a shriek to escape her, and the shadow, plunging into the morass, came straight towards the vehicle, but with slowness and precaution.

"Do not be afraid, Suzette," said Madam de Blanchemont, who at that moment was not very well assured herself; "it is our old mendicant, who comes very opportunely. Perhaps he can tell us of some house, to which he can go and fetch us assistance."

"My friend," said she, addressing the beggar with great presence of mind, "my servant, who is close by, is looking for you, that you may show us the way to the nearest habitation."

"Thy servant, my child!" familiarly replied the mendicant; "he is not here—he is a long way off. And, besides, he is so old, so stupid, so feeble, that if he were here he could not help thee."

This time Marcelle was alarmed.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SWAMP.

This answer sounded like the rough threat of a man who certainly entertained bad intentions. Marcelle snatched Edward in her arms, resolved to defend him at the expense of her life, if that were necessary. She was meditating jumping into the water on the side of the vehicle opposite to that which the mendicant had approached, when the rustic singer they had before heard, took up a second couplet, and this time at a much shorter distance.

The mendicant paused.

"We are lost!" murmured Suzette; "it is the rest of the band who are coming!"

"We are saved, on the contrary," said Marcelle; "it is the voice of an honest peasant."

And certainly the voice was one that inspired confidence, and the simple and moral song bespoke the peace of a good conscience. The steps of the horse also drew near, and the villager was evidently coming by the way which led to the swamp.

The mendicant drew back, and stood motionless, manifesting more circumspection than fear.

Marcelle leaned over the back of her conveyance to call the peasant, but he was singing too loud to hear; and if his horse, startled at the dark massive object which the vehicle presented before him, had not stopped gasping and panting, his master would have passed on his way, without perceiving the situation of the travellers.

"What the deuce is this?" exclaimed the voice of a stentor,

which expressed anything but fear, and which Madame de Blanchemont at once recognised as that of the tall miller. "Holloa! holloa! friends. You can't get through there. Are you all dead—that you don't speak?"

When Suzette recognised the miller, with whose handsome person she had been much struck in the morning notwithstanding the indifference of his toilet, she resumed her courage. She explained the pitcous plight to which her mistress and herself were reduced; and Grand-Louis, after having laughed without mercy at their accident, assured them that nothing was so easy in the world as to extricate them. The first thing he did was to disencumber himself of a great sack of wheat which he was carrying across his horse, when, perceiving the mendicant, who did not appear to dream of hiding himself—

"What! are you there too, Father Cadoche?" said he in a cheerful tone. "Stand out of the way, that I may throw my sack down."

"I came here to try to help these poor things," answered the beggar; "but they are so far in the water that I cannot get near them."

"Be quiet, old man, and don't get wet for nothing. At your age it is dangerous. I can get these women out very well without you."

And he came towards Madame de Blanchemont, wading in the mire up to the breast of his horse.

"Come, madam," said he cheerfully, "just get upon the shaft, and mount behind me. It is quite easy; you will scarcely wet the toes of your shoes. Your driver must have been a blockhead to have swamped you down here, when two steps further to the left, there are not above six inches of mud."

"I am grieved to make you take such a miserable bath," said Marcelle, "but my child——"

"Ah! the little gentleman! That is right—he ought to be first. Pass him to me—here—he must come in front; the saddle will not hurt him. My horse is not much used to such things, nor its rider either. Come, sit behind me, my little lady, and don't be afraid. Sophia has got a strong back and sure legs."

The miller softly deposited the mother and the child upon the greensward.

"And me!" cried Suzette; "are you going to leave me here inside?"

"No, mademoiselle," said the tall Louis, returning to fetch her. "Give me your parcels too; we shall all go together, be assured."

"And now," said he, when he had effected their complete disembarkation, "that unlucky driver may have the pleasure of coming to look for his empty carriage when he pleases. I have neither cords nor traces to yoke Sophia, and make her draw it; but I will conduct you wherever you like to go, my little ladies."

"Are we very far from Blanchemont?" asked Marcelle.

"Yes, that you are! Your driver has taken you an odd way to get you there. It is two leagues farther; and when you reached it, everybody would be in bed, and it would not be a very easy thing for you to make them get up and open the doors. But, if you please, we are only a little league from my Mill of Angibault: things are not very grand there, but we have everything that is necessary; and my mother is a good woman, who will not be cross at being roused up to put clean linen on the beds, and twist the necks of a couple of pullets. Come, ladies—you shall go home with me without ceremony. *à la guerre comme à la guerre, au moulin comme au moulin.* To-morrow morning they can get this *patache* out, and dry and clean it; and, in the mean time, it won't take cold by passing the night in the open air; and then you can be conducted to Blanchemont at any time you like."

There was a cordiality and even a delicacy in the blunt invitation of the miller; and Marcelle, won by the goodness of his heart, and by the mention of his mother accepted it with gratitude.

"That's right! you give me pleasure," said the miller. "I don't know you: perhaps you may be the Lady of Blanchemont, but it's all the same to me. If you were the Evil One (and they say he can make himself pretty when he pleases), I should not be satisfied to leave you to pass such a bad night as you would have done here. Ah, by-the-bye, I must not leave my sack of wheat behind me; I must load Sophia with it, and the little one must sit in front, and mamma at the back of it. Then, it won't cramp you—on the contrary it will help to support you. The demoiselle must come with me on foot, chatting to Father Cadoche, who is not very well dressed, but who knows a great deal. But where is he gone, the old serpent?" said he, looking round for the mendicant, who had disappeared. "Holloa! holloa! Father Cadoche, you must come and sleep at my house too. He does not answer; he does not fancy spending the night so. Come, ladies, let us go on."

"That man has frightened us very much," said Marcelle; "you know him then?"

"I have known him all my life. He is not a wicked man, and you had no occasion to be afraid of him."

"He certainly seemed to be threatening us, and his manner of saying *thee* and *thou* did not appear very encouraging."

"Did he say *thee* and *thou* to you, the old buffoon! That was not very suitable, but it is his manner, so do not think about it. He is a man who means no harm—an original! In short he is Father Cadoche, 'The Uncle of all the World,' as he is called, and who promises his inheritance to all the passers-by, while all the while he is nothing but a beggar, and his stick his only property."

Marcelle travelled very comfortably on the strong and

peaceable Sophia. Little Edward, whom she held very securely before her—"*goutait fort cette façon d'aller*"—as good Lafontaine says; he kept kicking with his little feet to accelerate their progress, but the animal never even feeling him did not move on a bit the more quickly. In short, Sophia pursued her way like a true miller's mare, without requiring guidance; and knowing the road by heart, choosing her own road in the darkness, across the water and the stones, without ever mistaking or making a false step. At the request of Marcelle, who was apprehensive on account of her old servant for the consequences of his passing a night under the beautiful stars, the miller made his thundering voice resound repeatedly in those silent glens; and Lapierre, who had lost himself in a neighbouring copse, and had been wandering round and round for the last half hour, within the space of a French acre, very quickly rejoined the little caravan.

After about an hour's journey, the sound of the waterfall of a mill-dam became audible, and the first pure rays of the rising moon shone on the roof of the vine-covered mill; and the silvered borders of the stream richly scattered with the fragrant mint and soap-wort.

Marcelle sprang lightly upon this perfumed carpet, after having placed her child in the arms of the miller. Joyous and proud at his equestrian journey, Edward threw his little arms around his neck, exclaiming—

"Good-day, *alochon!*"

Just as Grand-Louis had foretold, his aged mother arose without the least ill-temper, and with the help of a little maid of about fourteen or fifteen years of age the beds were very soon ready for their reception. Madame de Blanchemont felt greater need of repose than of food, and she would not allow the miller's mother to prepare any further entertainment than a cup of milk. Worn out with fatigue, she retired to rest with her boy by her side in a feather-bed, called a *couette*, which was of immoderate height and luxurious softness. These beds, of which the only faults are their being too warm and too soft, with a thick paillasse, are the only sort of couch for every class of persons, whether poor or rich, to be found in a country where the geese are abundant, and the winters are cold.

Fatigued with a long journey of eighty leagues, performed very rapidly, and above all by the manner in which its crowning portion had been accomplished in the *patache*, the beautiful Parisian would willingly have slept the greater part of the morning. But as soon as daylight appeared, the crowing of the cocks, the *tic-tac* of the mill, the powerful voice of the miller, and the various sounds of rustic occupation compelled her to give up the idea of longer repose. Besides, Edward, who was not fatigued the least in the world, and who already felt the stimulating influence of country air, began to play some merry gambols on the bed. Notwithstanding all the racket without, Suzette, who occupied the same chamber, slept so

profoundly that Marcelle had not the conscience to arouse her. Beginning, therefore, the new sort of life which she had resolved upon embracing, she rose and performed her toilette without the assistance of her maid, and with extreme pleasure discharged the same duty for her son, after which she left her apartment to seek her host and hostess, and to wish them a good day. She found, however, only the miller's boy and the little maid, and learned from them that their master and mistress had gone to the end of the field, and were engaged in some preparations for breakfast. Curious to know in what these consisted, Marcelle stepped over the rustic bridge, which was at the same time the sluice of the mill; and leaving on her right hand a fine plantation of young poplars, she traversed the length of the field which skirted the river, or rather the rivulet which, always full up to its embankment, constantly refreshed its flowery margin in its course; and was not in this part more than ten feet in width. This small stream of water possessed however great power; and in the vicinity of the mill it formed itself into a basin of considerable size, deep, motionless, and smooth as glass, in which were reflected the old willows and the moss-covered roof of the miller's habitation. Marcelle contemplated this peaceful and charming site which spoke to her heart, and awoke trains of instinctive but unconscious feelings. She had seen other spots more beautiful, but this was one of those places which excite emotions of indescribable tenderness, and to which it appears as if our destiny had drawn us to make us accept our joys and our sorrows, and that there also we may learn to discharge the duties of our lot.

CHAPTER V.

THE MILL.

MARCELLE, while penetrating into the vast thickets, where she expected to find her hosts, imagined herself to be entering into a virgin forest. The action of the water had thrown the ground into a ridgy and unequal surface, and the succession of hillocks was covered with the richest vegetation. It was observable, that the little river made great ravages in the rainy season. The alders, the beech, and the aspens, magnificent in size, and half overthrown, displaying their enormous roots bedded in the wet sand, appeared like intertwining hydras and serpents, hanging the one over the other in proud disorder. The river divided into a number of curving streams, following its own caprices, leaving those spots upon its margin most full of verdure, where on the dewy verdant turf the luxuriant briars hung their rich festoons, entwining and interlacing with a hundred other wild flowers, and abandoned to all the incom-

parable grace of their own free growth, unrestrained by the intruding hand of man. Never was English garden able to imitate this luxury of nature; these masses of deep verdure so happily grouped; these numberless basins which the river had itself hollowed out in the sands and among the flowers; these bowering trees whose branches met arching over the streams; these happy accidents of nature; these banks with their rich, irregular outline, even the very stakes scattered around covered with moss, and which seemed to have been thrown there for no other purpose than to complete the beauty of the decoration—all these formed a scene of beauty and enchantment.

Marcelle paused in a species of ecstasy, and had it not been for little Edward, who ran about like a wild fawn just restored to liberty, eager to imprint the traces of his little feet upon the sand freshly deposited upon the margin of the river, she would have forgotten everything in that contemplation. But the fear of seeing him fall into the water roused her maternal solicitude; and following his steps, pursuing him farther and farther into that luxuriant wilderness, she believed herself to be in one of those dreams in which nature appears to us so perfect in her beauty, that we can say we have seen in vision, the terrestrial Paradise.

At length she perceived the Miller and his mother on the opposite bank, the one throwing a sweeping-net for trout, the other milking a cow.

"Ah! ah! my little lady, up already!" said the Miller. 'You see that we are employed in your service. Here is my old mother, tormenting herself that she has nothing good to bring to table; but for my part I say that you will be contented with our good-will. We are neither cooks nor innkeepers; but where there is a tolerable appetite on one side, and a real welcome on the other——"

"You treat me a hundred times too well, my kind people," replied Marcelle, trusting herself upon the plank which served for a bridge, with Edward in her arms, to go and join them. "I never spent a better night in my life, and never saw a finer morning, than here with you. What fine trout you are catching there, sir! and you, madam, what beautiful creamy milk! You will quite spoil me, and I know not how to thank you."

"We are sufficiently thanked if you are pleased," said the old lady with a smile. "We have never seen anything of the fine world before, and we don't know how to pay compliments; but we see very clearly that you are kind and obliging, and easily satisfied. Come, let us go in. The muffins will soon be done, and this little fellow ought to be fond of strawberries. We have them growing in the garden, and it will amuse him to gather them for himself."

"You are so good, and your country is so beautiful, that I should like to spend my life here," said Marcelle with some warmth.

"Indeed!" said the Miller, with a good-humoured smile. "Ah! if the heart whispered that! You see very well, mother, that this country of ours is not, after all, so bad as you thought. Anybody who was rich might be very well off among us."

"Yes," replied his mother, "if they were in circumstances to build a château; and yet it would be a château very badly placed."

"Is it possible that you are discontented with this situation?" asked Marcelle with surprise.

"Oh! I am not discontented," replied the old woman; "I have spent my life here, and if it please God I shall die here. I have been used to this place for seventy-five years; and, besides, we ought to be content with our own country. But if you were forced to pass the winter here, you would not say that the country was so beautiful. When all the fields are flooded, and when we cannot even go out into the court-yard. No! that is not very pretty certainly!"

"Pooh! women are always frightening themselves," said Grand Louis. "You know very well that the water can't carry the house away, and that the mill is well protected: and besides, when bad weather does come, we must make the best of it All the winter, mother, you are wishing for summer; and while we have the summer, you distress yourself about the coming winter. For my own part, I say that we might live very happily here, and without any anxiety."

"And why, then, do you not do as you say?" replied his mother. "Are you yourself without anxiety? Do you find yourself so very happy in being a miller and having your house under water so often? Ah! if I were to repeat all that you sometimes say about the misfortune of not having better quarters, and not being able to make a fortune!"

"It is useless, mother, to repeat all the foolish things I sometimes say, and you may very well spare yourself the trouble."

While saying this, almost in a tone of reproach, the Miller looked at his mother gently and affectionately—almost with supplication. Their conversation appeared to Madame de Blanchemont to imply more than it may do to the reader. With her present views, she was desirous of knowing how this rustic life, the least hard among the lots of poverty, was felt and appreciated by those who were compelled to lead it. She did not wish to enter on its examination and its experience with ideas of too romantic a nature. Henry knew that its sufferings and privations were positive and actual, and doubted her power of enduring them; but on her own part she thought that these privations were not beyond her courage, and the point which interested her in the opinions of her hosts of the mill was to compare the degree of philosophy or of insensibility with which nature had provided them with that poetic sentiment, and with another—love—still more religious and powerful, which she herself entertained, and then to judge between them, which might best enable their possessor to en-

counter those hardships, and to endure those sufferings, which are necessarily entailed on a position of indigence. She therefore permitted a little curiosity to appear to his mother while the Miller was carrying his trout to the house, to be consigned, as he said, to the frying-pan.

"So," said she to the old woman, "you are not happy, and your son, notwithstanding his cheerful manner, knows what it is to suffer inquietude?"

"Ah! madam, for my part I am rich enough, and should be quite content with my lot if I could see my son happy. My poor deceased husband was in very comfortable circumstances; his business was prosperous; but he died before his family was grown up, and it fell upon me to establish my children as best I could. Now that his little property has been divided, the share of each is not very great. The mill belongs to my Louis, who is called Grand-Louis, as his father was called Grand-Jean, and as they call me Grand'Marie. For you see, madam we grow fast in our family, and all my children are well-proportioned and tall. But that is the only thing we can boast of: everything else that we have is too little to raise any false hopes."

"But why do you desire to be richer? Do you suffer from poverty? It seems to me that you have a comfortable home, that your food is excellent, and your health good."

"Oh, yes, yes! thanks to the good God, we have the necessaries of life, and perhaps those who are more deserving have not everything that they wish; but you see, madam, happiness and unhappiness are according to the ideas which we have——"

"You touch the true question," said Marcelle, who noticed in the countenance and language of the old woman much natural good sense and right feeling; "and since you appreciate things so well, why do you complain?"

"I don't complain: it is my son; or, to speak more truly, it is I who complain, because I see him discontented; and it is he who will not complain, because he has the courage to endure everything, and fears to give me pain. But when he has too much upon his mind, poor fellow! he uses only one expression, yet that breaks my heart. He says nothing but this: '*Never, never*, my mother!' and those words tell me that he has no hope. Still, as it is natural for him to be cheerful, like his poor dear father, he assumes the appearance of being reasonable and satisfied, and tells me all sorts of stories, on purpose to console me, and to make me think that what he has got in his head will happen at last"

"What has he got in his head? Is he ambitious?"

"Oh, yes: he has great ambition, but it is real madness. It is not, however, love of money, for he is not avaricious—far from it. In the family division of the property he gave up to his brothers and sisters everything that they wished; and

when he has made a little gain in business, he is ready to share it with the first who needs it. Just in the same way, he has not the least vanity; for he always wears his peasant's dress, while he has received the education of a citizen, and ought at least to make as good an appearance. In short, he has no vices, and no taste for extravagance: he is always content, and never goes anywhere except on business."

"Well, what is it then?" inquired Marcelle, whose sweet countenance and cordial tone insensibly won the confidence of the old woman.

"Ah! what would you have it to be but love?" said the Miller's mother with a mysterious smile, and that acute and delicate *je ne sais quoi* of sentiment which establishes in a random glance of the eye a communication of feeling between women, notwithstanding every difference of age or rank.

"You are right," said Marcelle, drawing nearer to la Grand'-Marie: "it is love which is the *trouble-fête* of youth. And this woman that he loves, is she then richer than your son?"

"Oh, yes! She is a girl—a young girl—a pretty girl, my faith!—and a good girl too, it must be owned. But she is rich—rich; and we are afraid that her parents will never give her to a miller."

Marcelle, struck with the similarity which existed between the romance of her own life and that of the Miller, experienced a degree of curiosity, mingled with emotion.

"If she loves your son," said she, "this good and beautiful girl will in the end marry him."

"That is what I myself say sometimes, for she loves him; of that I am certain, madam, though my Grand-Louis will not believe that it can be so. She is, however, a sensible girl, and would not agree to marry any man without the consent of her parents. And then she is cheerful, and a little bit of a coquette: it is natural at her age, for she is only eighteen. Her little provoking ways throw my poor boy into despair; and when I see that he eats next to nothing, and that he speaks sharply to Sophia (our mare—speaking with due respect, madam), I cannot avoid saying what I think. Then he puts a little confidence in what I say, for he knows that I can look deeper into a woman's heart than he can. As for me, I can observe the beautiful blush when she meets him, and see that she is always looking for something when she walks past this way; but I should be wrong to say that to the poor boy, for I would only be encouraging his madness, and I had far better tell him that he must not think of her."

"Why should you do so?" said Marcelle. "Love makes everything possible. Rest assured, my good mother, that a woman's love is stronger than every obstacle opposed to it."

"Yes, I thought so when I was young. I used to say that woman's love is like a river, which breaks everything down wherever it will pass, and mocks all barriers. I was richer

than my poor Grand-Jean, and yet I married him. But there was not the same difference as there is between us now and Mademoiselle ——"

Here little Edward suddenly interrupted the conversation, exclaiming to his mother—

"Stop! Henry is here!"

CHAPTER VI.

A NAME UPON A TREE.

Madame de Blanchemont trembled, and suffered a cry to escape from the depths of her heart, while searching around with her eyes to discover what had given rise to the exclamation of the child.

Following the direction of Edward's looks and gestures, Marcelle remarked a name engraved with a penknife upon the bark of a tree. The child had already commenced learning to read, more especially words with which he was familiar, and certain names which had been taught him from preference. He had instantly recognised that of Henry inscribed on the smooth trunk of a white poplar, and he imagined that his friend had been there to write it. Excited by the imagination of her son, Marcelle for a few moments persuaded herself that she saw Henry Lémor retiring among the groves of aspen-trees and willows; but it did not require much reflection to excite a sorrowful smile at the facility with which she had yielded herself to the illusion. Still, as we never willingly renounce a hope of what we desire, however vain the hope may be, she did not deny herself the satisfaction of inquiring of the Miller's mother, what person, belonging to her family or living in the neighbourhood, bore the name of Henry.

"None that I know of," replied Grand'-Marie. "Not very far off, in the town of Nohant, there is a family of Henries: but they are just people like ourselves, who know not how to write either upon paper or upon trees—at least, only excepting the son who belonged to the army.——But, let me see: it is more than two years since he has been here."

"You do not then know who can have traced this name?"

"I only know that somebody has written something, but I never gave it any attention. If I had seen it, I should not have been able to read it. I had, however, the means of being well educated; but in my time it was not the fashion. People made a cross upon deeds instead of signing them, and the one was as good in law as the other."

The Miller was now returning towards them, to tell them that breakfast was ready. Seeing the attention of Marcelle

fixed upon the engraved name, and knowing very well both how to read and write, though he had not remarked the circumstance of the tree before, he endeavoured to find an explanation.

"It was only the other day I saw a man here who might have been amusing himself in that manner," said he; "and there are not many of the townspeople who come this way."

"And who was that man the other day?" asked Marcelle, compelling herself to assume an air of indifference.

"It was a gentleman who did not tell us his name," replied the old woman. "We do not know much, but we know that curiosity is rude. Louis is like me in that respect—he is above such a thing. On the contrary, our country people ask questions at random of every stranger they meet, while we never wish to know anything but what people desire to tell us. That gentleman seemed to wish to keep his name and his intentions quite to himself."

"However, he asked a great many questions himself," said Louis, "and we had as good a right to ask questions in our turn. I don't know why I did not take that liberty, for he had not a forbidding look, and I am not naturally bashful; but the truth is, he had a strange manner about him that made me feel uneasy."

"What sort of manner had he then?" asked Marcelle, whose interest and curiosity became every moment more strongly excited by the Miller's words.

"I do not know how to tell you?" he replied. "I did not take much notice while he was here, and it was only when he was gone that I began to think about him. You remember, mother?"

"Yes, you said to me—'Mother, that man is like me: he has not got everything he desires.'"

"Bah! I could not say that," replied Grand-Louis, who feared that his mother would suffer his secret to escape, not suspecting that she had already revealed it. 'I simply said, 'Here is an individual who does not seem contented with the world.'"

"Was he then very sorrowful?" asked Marcelle with emotion.

"He appeared to be thinking deeply. He stopped here at least three hours by himself, sitting on the ground there, where you are now—looking at the river flowing past, as if he would count every drop of water. I thought he must be ill, and I twice went to invite him into the house to take some refreshment; but when I came near him he started up, like a man awakened out of a dream, and looked annoyed and vexed, but immediately after softened into gentleness and good humour, thanked me, and finished by accepting a morsel of bread and a glass of water, but nothing more."

"It is Henry!" cried little Edward, who, holding by his mo-

ther's dress, listened with attention. "You know very well, mamma, that Henry never drinks wine."

Madame de Blanchemont blushed, turned pale, and blushed again; then, in a voice which she vainly endeavoured to subdue into steadiness and freedom from emotion, she asked what business the stranger had apparently come to transact in the country.

"I do not know," replied the Miller, fixing a penetrating look upon the beautiful but agitated countenance of the young lady, and saying to himself, "Ah! here is another just like me, who has got something into her head."

And, willing to satisfy as soon as possible the curiosity of Marcelle respecting the stranger, and his own respecting the sentiments of his guest, he entered complacently into all the details, which she awaited with much anxiety.

The stranger had arrived on foot about a fortnight before. He had spent two days in wandering about the Black Valley, after which he had not been seen there again. No one knew where he had passed the nights: the Miller presumed it was beneath the beautiful stars. He did not appear to possess much money, but had offered to pay for his poor repast at the mill, and on the refusal of the Miller to receive payment, he had thanked him with the simplicity of a man who did not blush to accept the hospitality of another of the same rank and condition as himself. His dress was that of a decent mechanic or country tradesman—simply a blouse and a straw hat. He carried a little knapsack on his shoulders; and from time to time, placing it upon his knees, he drew out a paper, and was apparently taking notes. He talked of having been to Blanchemont, but no one had seen him there; yet he spoke of the farm and the old château like a man who had examined them attentively. While partaking of his simple fare of bread and water, he asked the Miller many questions respecting the extent of the property, the value of its produce, the nature of the mortgages which had been granted—on the reputation and character of the farmer, on the expenditure of the late M. de Blanchemont, and of the other estates. In short, the Miller and his mother finally came to the conclusion that he was an agent sent down by some intending purchaser to acquire all necessary information respecting the nature and quality of the land.

"For it appears that the Blanchemont estate is to be put up for sale, if that has not already been done," added the Miller, who was not quite so free from the fever of curiosity peculiar to the peasants as his mother had pretended.

Marcelle, who was agitated by a very different solicitude, scarcely heard the innuendo which terminated this recital.

"Of what age might the stranger be?" she asked

"If his appearance did not deceive," replied the mother, "he was about the age of Louis—four or five-and-twenty."

"And—his person? Is he dark and middle-sized?"

"He is neither very tall nor very fair," said the Miller: "he

is not ill-looking, but he is pale, like a man who does not enjoy good health."

"This may be Henry!" thought Marcelle, though the portrait was a little rudely sketched, and scarcely answered the ideal which she carried in her heart.

"He is a man not very easily misled in a matter of business," replied Grand-Louis; "for, to oblige M. Bricolin, the farmer at Blanchemont, who wishes to obtain the property himself, and for the sake of teasing him a little, I amused myself with depreciating its value; but the youth did not allow himself to be blinded. 'The land is worth this and that—so much and so much,' said he, reckoning the receipts, the charges, and the expenditure, upon the tips of his fingers, like a person who knew what he was about, and had no occasion for a great deal of talk with a glass in hand, according to the fashion of the country, for he could see at once the strong and the weak side of a business matter."

"I must be mad!" thought Madame de Blanchemont: "this stranger is some manager who has come down to make preparatory arrangements in the country; and his sorrowful air, his reveries by the water side, are simply the result of fatigue and heat. Then, as to his name of Henry, it is only a chance that he bears it, and a mere accident which has made him inscribe it on a tree if he even did so. Henry would never enter on matters of business; he knows nothing of the value of property, or the sources from which wealth may be derived. No, no! it was not Henry. Besides, has he not been in Paris within a fortnight? Only three days have passed since I saw him, and he did not tell me he had been absent recently. What should he do in the Black Valley? Did he even know that the estate of Blanchemont, of which I do not remember ever to have spoken to him, was situated in this province?"

Having withdrawn her gaze, though not without some effort, from the mysterious inscription which had excited so many thoughts and feelings, Madame de Blanchemont followed her hosts into the house, and found an excellent breakfast spread upon a massive table, covered with the whitest of table-cloths. Furmenty, the favourite dish of the country, and made of wheat boiled in water and afterwards dressed with milk, cakes of pears, spiced cream, the trout of the Vauvre, and tender little chickens, cast all palpitating upon the gridiron, a salad newly gathered and beaten up with nut-oil, cheese made from goats' milk, and fruit just plucked from the bough—all looking most exquisite and inviting to little Edward. Plates had been placed for the two servants and the Miller and his mother, at the same table with Madame de Blanchemont; and her hostess was very much astonished to hear the refusal of Lapierre and Suzette to sit by the side of their mistress. But Marcelle herself interposed, and told them they must conform to the custom of the country, and she herself gaily began that life of equality, the idea of which gave her so much pleasure.

The manners of the Miller were blunt and off-hand, but never coarse. Those of his mother were a little more obsequious; and, notwithstanding the remonstrances of Grand-Louis, who was influenced by his good sense rather than by his knowledge of society, she importuned her guests to eat more than they desired; but it was with so much sincere hospitality that Marcelle could not for a moment find her attentions troublesome. This old woman had both a good heart and a good understanding, and her son resembled her; only that he had received a much better education; he could read, and he had reflected, but he made no parade of his acquirements. In conversing with him, Marcelle found his ideas more just, his opinions more sound and wholesome, his tastes more natural and truthful, than she could possibly have anticipated from the commencement of their acquaintance at the village inn. All the qualities and resources of his mind, as they were gradually unfolded, possessed a far higher value because vanity and the love of display had no part in their exhibition; for he adopted the manners of the humblest peasants, rather than those refinements of the use of which he was not really ignorant. It was said that he feared above anything to pass for the wit of the village, and that he had a profound contempt for those who disgraced their good descent and their honest condition by giving themselves ridiculous airs. He spoke with sufficient purity of diction, without always disdaining the simple and expressive phraseology of the country. When he forgot himself, that is to say, when he expressed his sentiments in a language superior to his condition, the Miller could be no longer recognised; but in such cases he seemed hastily to recal himself to a recollection of his sphere, and, as if ashamed of having swerved from it, to resume his usual tone of pleasantry without bitterness, and familiarity without insolence.

Marcelle felt a little embarrassed, however, when, about seven o clock in the morning, her rustic vehicle was brought to the Miller's house, and again placed at her disposal; for she felt desirous, in taking leave of her hosts, to recompense them for her entertainment; but they refused to receive the least return.

"No, my dear lady," said the Miller, in a quiet but firm tone, "we are not innkeepers. We might have been so, for it would not have been beneath us; but not being so, we can receive nothing from you."

"But," said Marcelle, "when I have occasioned you all this trouble and expense, will you not permit me to indemnify you or make you some return? I know that your mother has given up her chamber to me, that she has taken your bed from you, and that you have been obliged to sleep upon hay in your loft. This morning you have been fishing for us, instead of attending to your own affairs. Your mother has heated the oven; she has had a great deal of trouble, and we have certainly eaten up everything in the house."

"Oh! my mother slept very well, and I slept still better,"

replied Grand-Louis. "The fish of the Vauvre count for nothing: to-day is Sunday, and on Sunday I always spend the morning in fishing. We shall not be ruined for a little meal, bread, and milk, and the indifferent chickens, which have served for your breakfast; so you see that the obligation is not very great. You may accept it without regret, and there is very little fear of our reproaching you with it, because most probably we shall never meet again."

"I hope we shall," replied Marcelle, "for I expect to remain for a few days at least at Blanchemont. I must come here again to thank you and your mother for this hospitality, so cordially extended to me, but which I am a little ashamed of accepting in this way."

"And why be ashamed of accepting a little service from honest people? When you are satisfied that their hearts are good, the account is balanced. I know very well that in all the great towns everybody pays even for a glass of water; but it is a mean custom, and in our country we should be very unhappy if we could not oblige one another. Come, come—let us say no more about it."

"Then you will not allow me to come another time and ask you for another breakfast? You compel me either to give up that pleasure or to become encroaching."

"That is another thing. We have only done our duty in giving you what you call our hospitality, for we are brought up to consider hospitality a duty; and though the good custom is a little on the decline, and poor people now take everything they can get without actually making any demand, it is not our opinion—and my mother and myself think alike in this matter—that there ought to be any change in the good old customs. If there had been a tolerable inn in the neighbourhood, I should have taken you to it last night, conceiving that you might have liked better to be there than with us, and seeing very well that you had the means of paying for your night's lodging; but there was no inn, either good or bad; and unless I had been a man without heart, I could not have left you to spend the night in such a miserable situation. But do you think I should have invited you here if I had had the least intention of making you pay? No, no; an innkeeper alone could have done that, and you see that we have neither broom nor holly at our door."

"I should have remarked that on entering," said Marcelle, "and been more considerate in what I was doing. But you do not answer my question; you do not wish me to come again."

"That is another matter. I invite you to return whenever you like. You think the place pretty, and your little boy enjoys our muffins. These things encourage me to say that, as often as you like to come, you will give us pleasure."

"And you will compel me, as you have done to-day, to accept everything without making the least return?"

"When I have *invited* you! I must have explained myself very badly."

"But do you not see, according to my view of the matter, that I should be abusing your kindness?"

"No, I do not see that. When we receive an invitation we have a right to accept it."

"Come!" said Madame de Blanchemont, "I see it is you who possess the true politeness, and that we in the great world are without it. You teach me that discretion, that quality so highly extolled, and unhappily so requisite in our dealings with each other, has only become necessary since kindness is changed into compliment, and since politeness is no longer the expression of a sincere desire to oblige."

"You are right!" exclaimed the Miller, whose countenance was enlightened by a ray of lively intelligence; "and on the faith of a man I am most truly happy in having had an opportunity of being of service to you."

"In that case, you must permit me to receive you as my guest in my turn when you come to Blanchemont."

"Ah! as to that you must excuse me. I shall not be with you, but with your farmers, fetching corn, and I shall pay my respects to you with pleasure."

"Ah! M. Louis, then you refuse to breakfast with me?"

"Yes, and no. I often eat with your farmers; but if you were there everything would be altered. You are a noble lady, and that is sufficient."

"Explain yourself. I do not understand you."

"Do you not see that you are not preserving the customs of the old lords your ancestors? Why not send your Miller to eat with your servants in the kitchen? For my part, it would not at all annoy me to eat with them, as they have done with me here to-day; but it appears ridiculous for you to have been sitting down in my house with me, and I could not sit down in your house with you—in the fireside corner, with your chair by the side of mine. You see I am a little proud. I do not blame you. All must act as they think, and follow their own customs; and just for this very reason I see no cause why I should submit to other people's ways when I am not obliged to do so."

Marcelle was much struck by the good sense and the frank sincerity of the Miller. She felt that he was giving her an excellent lesson, and she rejoiced at having adopted projects which enabled her to receive it without a blush.

"M. Louis," she said, "you deceive yourself in what you think respecting me. It is not my fault if I belong to the class of the nobility; but, either by accident or good fortune, I have arrived at the conclusion that I can no longer conform to its customs. If you come to visit me at Blanchemont, I shall not forget that you have received me as your equal, that you have assisted me as your neighbour; and to prove to you that I am not ungrateful, I shall, if it be necessary, myself place plates

for your mother and yourself at my own table, just as you have placed mine at yours."

"Would you really do that?" exclaimed the Miller, looking at Marcelle with a mixture of surprise, respectful doubt, and friendly sympathy. In that case I will come—or rather, no, I will not come; for I see quite well that you are a right-minded person."

"But I cannot conceive to what that observation refers."

"Ah! if you do not understand, I am rather at a loss how to explain myself better."

"Come, Louis, I believe you are mad," said his mother, who had been listening with a very serious air to the whole conversation. "I don't know where you have learned all that you have been saying to our lady here. Excuse him, madam: the boy is a careless fellow, and always says whatever comes into his head to everybody, great or small. I hope you will not be offended Believe me, he has a good heart at the bottom; and I see by his looks that he would throw himself into the fire for you at this moment."

"Into the fire! I am not so sure of that," said the Miller, laughing; "but into the water I might, because that would be my own element. You see, mother, that Madame de Blanchemont is a sensible woman, and that we can say anything that we think of to her; and you know that I speak plainly enough to M. Bricolin, her farmer, who is certainly very much more to be feared."

"Well, then, Master Louis, explain yourself; I wish to understand you. If I am really a kind and obliging person, why will you not pay me a visit?"

"Because familiarity with us would injure you, and it would injure us for you to treat us as your equals. You would find yourself drawn into a disagreeable position. Those in your own class would blame you, and reproach you with having forgotten your rank; and I know what an enormity that would be in their eyes. Besides, the goodness that you practised towards us you would be obliged to extend to everybody else, otherwise you would excite a general feeling of jealousy, and draw down enmity upon us. We must each pursue our own path. It is said that the world is very much altered within the last fifty years; but I say that there is nothing altered except our feelings towards each other. We no longer know how to submit ourselves; and my mother there, whom I love so well, the dear old woman! sees things in a different light from me. But the sentiments of the noble and the wealthy are the same as they have always been, and if you, madam, do not participate in these sentiments—if you do not despise the poor a little—if you do them the honour of making them your equals—it will, in all probability, be so much the worse for you. I have often seen your husband, the deceased M. de Blanchemont, whom some people called the Lord of Blanchemont. He came every year into the country, and stopped two

or three days. He always said *thee* and *thou* to every one of us. If it had been through friendship, it would have been all very well, but it was only the expression of his contempt: it was necessary to speak to him standing, and always hat-in-hand. For my own part, I very seldom went near him. One day he met me on the road and ordered me to hold his horse. I turned a deaf ear; he called me a booby, and I gave him a look sideways. If he had not been so feeble and in such bad health, I should certainly have said a couple of words to him; but that would have been cowardly in me, so I went on my way singing. If that man had been alive, and had heard you speak to us in the way you have been doing, he would certainly not have felt very well pleased. In addition to all this, I have been noticing the looks of your servants to-day, and I perceive that they think you too familiar with us, and even with themselves. So then, madam, it will be all very well for you to take your walks to the mill; but it will be better for us, who love you, not to sit down with you at your table in the château."

"For the sake of the words which you have just spoken, I forgive you all the rest; and I promise myself to conquer you yet," said Marcelle, holding out her hand, with an expression of countenance of which the noble purity commanded respect, at the same time that her manner encouraged affection. The Miller blushed at receiving that delicate hand in his own capacious grasp, and for the first time felt abashed in her presence, like a child of generous and ardent disposition, whose pride is in a moment overcome by emotion.

"I am going to mount 'Sophia,' and act as your guide to Blanchemont," said he, after a moment of silent embarrassment "The distance is not great, and that unlucky driver may miss the way again."

"Very well; I accept your offer," said Marcelle. "Will you still say that I am proud?"

"I will say," replied Grand-Louis, darting away with precipitation, "that if all rich women were like you——"

They did not hear the end of his speech, but his mother took its conclusion upon herself.

"He thinks," said she, "that if the girl he loves so well had as little pride as you have, he would not be so unhappy himself."

"And cannot I be useful to him?" said Marcelle, imagining with pleasure that she was rich, and might be justly generous.

"Perhaps, if you were to speak well of him before the young lady, for you will know her well—but, nonsense! she is too rich!"

"We will speak of that another time," said Marcelle, observing that her servants had entered to look for the various parcels. "I shall come again very soon—perhaps to-morrow."

The ragged and red-haired driver had passed the night under a tree, not having in the darkness been able to discover any house in the Black Valley. At day-dawn he had perceived the mill, and having made his way to it and been kindly received, both he and his horse had been fed and comforted. He was quite prepared, in his ill-humour, to answer with insolence the reproaches which he expected to receive; but on one side Marcelle offered him none, and on the other the Miller so overpowered him with raillery that he could not utter a word in his own behalf, and remounted his shaft, utterly out of countenance. Little Edward entreated his mother to allow him to ride on horseback before the Miller, who, affectionately taking him in his arms, said in a low voice to his mother—

"If we had but a little fellow like this to cheer up the house here, mother!—But that will never be!"

And his mother perfectly well understood that he would never marry any other but the one single object to whom he could make no reasonable pretension.

CHAPTER VII.

BLANCHEMONT.

MARCELLE, having taken her farewell of the Miller's mother, and liberally recompensed the servants of the mill, though in secret, gaily remounted her wretched vehicle. Her first attempt at equality had cheered her soul, and the continuation of the romance which she expected to realize presented itself to her eyes arrayed in the most poetic colours. However, a single glance at Blanchemont singularly darkened her thoughts, and her heart grew dejected as she crossed the entrance of her domains.

Ascending the course of the Vauvre, after having surmounted the difficulties of a steep ascent, they found themselves upon the rising ground of Blanchemont. This was an extent of grassy down overshadowed with old trees, and commanding a charming landscape; not outspreading to the distant view like that of the Black Valley, but cold, melancholy, and of an aspect sufficiently wild and solitary; and human habitations were so thinly scattered there that scarcely a tiled roof or the thatch of a cottage could be distinguished among the trees.

A rustic church and the cottages of the hamlet encircled the rising ground, inclining towards the river, which made in that spot one of its graceful bends. From thence a wide rugged road conducted to the château, which was situated a little behind, under the hill, in the midst of fields and waving corn. Reaching the level ground, they lost sight of the fine

blue horizon, of Berry and La Marche; and it was necessary to mount to the second story of the château to recover the view.

The château, with its towers embellished with corbels at each corner, had never been a place of great strength, the walls not being more than five or six feet in thickness at their base. The date of the building was that of the end of the feudal era. However, the smallness of the doors, and the particularly scanty complement of windows, together with the innumerable ruined walls and turrets which enclosed it, told of a time of discord, in which no precaution was neglected to guard against a sudden attack. The castle was not altogether destitute of a species of elegance, its form being that of an oblong square, containing on every floor one large apartment, with a tower at every corner, consisting of chambers of the smallest dimensions; and there was also a tower in the centre of the rear buildings, enclosing the only staircase. The chapel had become isolated in the general destruction, the moats filled up with ruins, the turrets dilapidated and half broken down; the sheet of water, which in former days had bathed the extent of the north side of the château, had been converted into a pretty meadow, with merely a little gurgling spring rising in the centre.

The picturesque aspect of the old château was not the first thing that struck the attention of the heiress of Blanchemont on this introduction to the home of her forefathers. The Miller, on helping her to descend from her carriage, guided her steps to what he called the "new château," and to the vast dependencies of the farm, situated at the foot of the old manor, bordering on the capacious court, enclosed on one side by a crenellated wall, and on the other by a ditch filled with muddy water. Nothing could be more dull and disagreeable than this dwelling of the rich farmer. The "new château" could be considered as nothing more than a mere peasant's house, of large dimensions, built some fifty years back, with materials from the ruins of the fortifications. However, the solid walls freshly mended, and the roof of new glaring red tiles, spoke of recent repairs. This renovated exterior jarred with the mellowed tone of antiquity of the other agricultural buildings. The dark battlements above, marked by the imposing grandeur of ancient architecture, looked frowning down upon an extensive range of barns and stables, which formed the pride of the farmer and the admiration of all the agriculturists of the country. But that enclosure, so useful to the industrious tiller of the ground, so commodious for rearing his cattle and storing his crops, imprisoned the looks and thoughts within a narrow, gloomy space, most prosaic, and of disgusting repulsiveness. From the enormous heaps of manure, sunk within square, stone-paved pits, and rising about ten or twelve feet high, there escaped countless little impure streams, which were designedly suffered to flow at perfect liberty towards the lower grounds,

to refresh the growth of the culinary vegetables. This nutritive provision, though it may be the favourite wealth of the agriculturist, making his heart beat with exulting pride when any of his fraternity come to view and envy his treasure, has yet a revolting aspect, and exhales an odour repulsive to all the uninitiated. In works of agriculture, carried out on a small scale, these details do not prove offensive either to the eye or the mind of the artist. A certain degree of confusion in the scattered requisites for farming, with their surrounding borderings of verdure, half hiding and half revealing the *minutiæ* of such scenes, may not be disgusting; but on a great scale, and over a large extent of ground, nothing can be more disagreeable than an atmosphere and an aspect so impure. Crowds of turkey-cocks, geese, and ducks and drakes, occupied every part of the solid soil spared from immersion under the drainings from the heaps of compost, as if they considered themselves sole proprietors of their domain. The rough and rugged surface of the ground was intersected by a paved pathway, which at the present season was as impassable as the rest of the approach. The ruinous remains of the former roof of the new château, which had been recently repaired, remained scattered around, and to cross the courtyard was literally to walk over a field of tiles. It was six months since the workmen had completed their labour of newly roofing the house, this being done at the expense of the proprietor, while the duty of clearing away the rubbish, devolving on the farmer, had not yet been performed. However, he fully intended that this should be done as soon as the summer work was over and his labourers were at liberty. One reason for this was, that he wished to economize a few days of his workmen's time; and another was to be found in the constitutional and intense apathy of the Berrichon, which always causes him to leave something to be done, as if, after an effort, exhausted nature demands repose as indispensable, making it necessary that he should partake of the pleasures of indolence before the completion of any task.

Marcelle compared the gross and repulsive opulence of the farmer with the poetical prosperity of the Miller; and she would have expressed her feelings to him on the subject, if the cries of distress uttered by the terrified turkey-cocks, which stood motionless in their alarm, the maternal hissings of the geese, and the barking of four or five hungry fox-coloured dogs, had not made it impossible to introduce a word. As it was Sunday, the cattle were in the sheds, and the labourers lounging on the steps of the doors in their holiday attire—that is to say, in coarse frocks of Prussian blue, reaching from neck to feet. These men looked into the carriage with gaping astonishment; but not one of them took the least trouble either to receive the lady or to give notice of the arrival of a visiter to M. Bricolin, the farmer. It fell, therefore, upon Grand-Louis to be the introducer of Madame de Blanchemont, and he discharged his

office very unceremoniously; for, entering the house without knocking, he cried aloud—

"Madame Bricolin, come here! Madame de Blanchemont has come to see you!"

This unexpected intelligence excited a great sensation among the three ladies of M. Bricolin's family, who had just returned from mass, and had begun to partake of a slight collation, as they stood. They remained stupified and motionless, gazing at each other, and asking by looks what they should say or do in such a case; and they had not yet moved from their respective positions when Marcelle entered. The group which presented itself to her notice was composed of three generations: the grandmother, who neither knew how to read nor write, and who was dressed like a peasant; Madame Bricolin, the farmer's wife, who made rather a better appearance, might have been taken, perhaps, for a clergyman's housekeeper, and had received sufficient education to be able to write her own name so that it could be read, and to discover the hours of the sun's rising and the age of the moon in the Liège Almanac; and lastly, Mademoiselle Rose Bricolin, beautiful and blooming as a rose in May, who could read romances with perfect facility, and even write out the housekeeping expenses and dance contre-danses. Her hair was perfectly well arranged, and she wore a pretty dress of pink muslin, most tastefully contrived—perhaps a little exaggerated in the extreme of fashion. This agreeable-looking girl, whose appearance was at once simple and attractive, nearly effaced in Marcelle's mind the unpleasant impression of the sour looks and rough deportment of her mother; while the grandmother, tanned and wrinkled like a thorough countrywoman, had yet an expression of countenance that was frank and open. All the three remained with open mouths, as if transfixed. The old woman asked herself if this could indeed be the same beautiful young lady whom she had sometimes seen when she came to visit the château thirty years ago (that lady having been, in fact, the mother of Marcelle), knowing all the while that she had long been dead. Madame Bricolin, the farmer's wife, perceived that she had too hastily, on returning from mass, tied a kitchen apron over her brown merino dress; while Rose Bricolin rapidly remembered that she was irreproachably attired and shod, and that she might, thanks to its being Sunday, be surprised by an elegant Parisian without having occasion to blush at being caught in some too vulgar domestic occupation.

Madame de Blanchemont had always been, in the ideas of the Bricolin family, a problematical being, who perhaps did exist, but whom they never had seen, and certainly never should see. They had, moreover, known her husband, whom they could not love on account of his pride, nor esteem on account of his extravagance; but doubtless they feared him a little, because he was always wanting money and advancing rents. Since his death, they expected only to have a steward

to deal with, as he had been constantly in the habit of saying, when producing the too complaisant signature of his wife as the authority for all his business transactions: "Madame de Blanchemont is but a child, who never meddles with any of these affairs. All that she wishes for is the money, and she troubles herself very little as to how it is obtained, so long as I take it to her." Thus it was that the husband had always placed to the account of the expensive tastes of his wife the prodigalities which he was lavishing on his own mistresses. The farmer and his family had no suspicion of the true character of the young widow, and Madame Bricolin believed herself to be in a dream, thus to see her making her appearance in person in the middle of the Blanchemont farm. Had she come to benefit or to oppress them? This strange apparition, was it of good or evil augury to the prosperity of the Bricolins? Had she come to call them to account for the past, or to make still further demands for the future?

While the farmer's wife, engrossed by these sudden perplexities, examined Marcelle a little nearer, like a goat put upon the defensive at the sight of a strange dog among the flock, Rose Bricolin, suddenly won by the affable manner and simple appearance of the stranger, found courage to advance a couple of steps towards her. The grandmother Bricolin was the least embarrassed of the three; the first emotion of surprise over, and the enfeebled intellect having made an effort to comprehend that something was required to be done, she approached Marcelle with a homely frankness, and received her almost in the same terms as the mother of the Miller of Angibault had previously done, though with less deference and agreeableness. The two others, a little reassured by the kind and gentle manner in which Marcelle asked their hospitality for two or three days, telling them that she had come to consult M. Bricolin respecting her affairs, soon earnestly pressed upon her the offer of some breakfast.

Marcelle declined this invitation, pleading the excellent repast she had taken an hour before at the mill of Angibault; and it was then only that the looks of the three ladies turned towards Grand-Louis, who had remained at the entrance of the mansion, talking with the servant respecting flour, as a pretext for remaining a little behind. The expression of countenance was very different in the trio as they turned towards him. That of the grandmother was friendly—that of her daughter-in-law, the farmer's wife, full of disdain—that of Rose uncertain and indefinable, as if there were a mingling of sentiments within.

"How!" cried Madame Bricolin, in a querulous and scornful tone, when Marcelle had recounted in a few words the adventures of the night, "you have been obliged to sleep at the mill, and we not know it! Why did not that stupid miller bring you hither at once? Ah, madam! what a wretched night you must have passed!"

"On the contrary, I spent an excellent one. I have been treated like a queen, and I am under a thousand obligations to M. Louis and his mother."

"I am not at all surprised at that," said the old woman. "Grand'Marie is a clever woman, and manages her house so well! She was the friend of my young days, we kept our sheep together (saving your presence). We were two pretty girls in our time—at least people said so then, though it does not appear so now—does it, madam? One knew no more than the other. We could spin, and knit, and make cheese, and all that. However, we married very differently: she took a man who was poorer than herself, and I got one who was richer; but they were both love-matches. In our time such things did happen; now-a-days people only marry for interest, and crown-pieces count for more than affections. These things have not changed for the better—have they, Madame de Blanchemont?"

"I am quite of your opinion," said Marcelle.

"Oh, mother! what tales you are telling Madame de Blanchemont!" interposed Madame Bricolin, harshly. "Do you think she takes any interest in your old histories? Ho, Master Miller!" she exclaimed in an imperious tone, "go and see if M. Bricolin is in the warren, or in the oat-field behind the house, and tell him to come and pay his respects to Madame de Blanchemont."

"M. Bricolin," replied the Miller, with an open countenance and an air of cheerful frankness, "is neither in the oat-field nor his warren. I saw him, as we passed, drinking his glass with the priest at the parsonage."

"Oh, yes; I dare say he is at the parsonage," said the grandmother: "M. le Curé is always very hungry and very thirsty after high mass, and he likes to have somebody to keep him company. Louis, my boy—you who are always so obliging—will you go and fetch him."

"I will go this moment," said the Miller, who had not moved at the command of the farmer's wife; and he set off with speed.

"If you think him obliging," grumbled Madame Bricolin, looking at her mother-in-law with anger, "you are not very difficult to please."

"Oh, mother! we must not say so," in a soft voice, murmured the beautiful Rose Bricolin, "Grand-Louis has such a good heart!"

"And what have you to do with his good heart?" replied Madame de Bricolin in extreme irritation. "What has there been going on between you two lately?"

"Oh, mother! it is you who have been unjust to him lately," replied Rose, who appeared not to be in any great dread of her mother, accustomed as she was to be supported by her grandmother. "You are always rude to him, though you know that my father has so much respect for him."

"You will do a great deal better," said the farmer's wife

"instead of arguing here, to go and get your own room ready for madam; for it is the best in the house, and perhaps she may wish to rest before dinner-time. You must excuse us, madam, if you are not so comfortable here as we could wish. It was only last year that the deceased M. de Blanchemont agreed to have the new house put a little in repair, for it was in almost as ruinous a condition as the old one; and it was only at the same time when the lease was renewed that we could begin to furnish it a little more conveniently. Nothing is finished yet; the rooms are not papered; and we are waiting for the beds and the chests of drawers which are coming from Bourges. Some of the things are still unpacked; and indeed we are all topsy-turvy with the workmen putting us into so much confusion."

The domestic embarrassments which Madame Bricolin thus referred to, in her acrimonious discourse, might have been accounted for much in the same way as those which Marcelle had remarked on the exterior of the dwelling. Parsimony and indolence united had had the effect of postponing to an indefinite period the enjoyment of those luxuries which they already possessed, but of which they did not as yet allow themselves the indulgence. The dull and smoky place in which they had been surprised by the lady of the manor was the most neglected and uninviting apartment in the new château. It was at once a kitchen, an eating-room, and a parlour. The fowls had access to it, because the door, being on the ground-floor, was constantly open; and it was one of the farmer's wife's never-ending occupations to chase them out, keeping up a perpetual warfare between herself and her barn-door brood. It was here that the Bricolin family always received the peasants with whom they had business, who came at all times; and, as their dirty feet and careless and uncultivated habits, would certainly have destroyed an inlaid floor and handsome furniture, they contented themselves with using great straw chairs, and wooden benches upon the bare flagstones which were very uselessly swept some ten times a-day. The multitudes of flies which swarmed unrestrained, and the fire which burned at all hours and at all seasons in that vast chimney, which was ornamented with pot-hooks of all dimensions, rendered this part of their abode especially disagreeable in summer; and yet, notwithstanding all its faults, it was the place always occupied by the family; and when they made Marcelle pass into the adjoining apartment, she was pleased to perceive that it had never been used, although it had been finished above a year. This state *salon* was decorated with the coarser indulgences of the best room of an inn: the newly-laid floor had not yet received its polish; but gaudy Indian curtains were already hung suspended from vulgar copper ornaments in most detestable taste. The garniture of the fire-place was in keeping with the style of these supposed decorations. A very rich stand, from which coffee might occasionally be taken, had all its gilding and bronzing

still carefully enveloped in paper. The furniture was covered with red and white calico, under which the woollen damask was destined to remain without seeing daylight; and as in the farm houses they were still ignorant of the distinction between bedchambers and sitting-rooms, two little mahogany bedsteads, not as yet adorned with curtains, were placed one on each side of the door, to the right and left, and these completed the arrangements of that state apartment.

Marcelle found this house so truly disagreeable, that she resolved not to remain in it. She protested that she could not think of causing the least inconvenience to her host, and that she should find in the village some peasant's cottage in which she might sleep—at least if the old château would not afford one habitable chamber. This last idea seemed to cause some anxiety to Madame Bricolin, and she spared no pains to divert her visiter from such a resolution.

"It is very true," said she, "that there has always been a chamber in the old château which is called 'the master's.' When M. le Baron, your late husband, did us the honour of coming here, he always wrote a few days before, that we might prepare for his arrival; and we took care that everything should be clean, in order that he might not find it too unpleasant But the miserable château is so dreary and dilapidated, the rats and the owls make such a frightful tumult in the inside—and, besides, the roof is in such a bad state and the walls are so tottering, that to a certainty you could not sleep there. I don't know what fancy M. le Baron could have had for that chamber, but he would not accept one with us; and it was said that he would have felt himself degraded if he had passed one night under any other roof at Blanchemont than that of his own old château."

"I will look at the room," said Marcelle; "and if I can sleep under shelter it is all that I desire. In the mean time, I entreat you not to disarrange anything here. I cannot think of giving you so much trouble."

Rose expressed the great desire which she felt that Madame de Blanchemont should accept the use of her apartment, and this on terms so amiable, and with a countenance so persuasive, that Marcelle softly took her hand to thank her, but without changing her resolution. The aspect of the new château, joined to an instinctive repugnance which she felt towards Madame Bricolin, induced her obstinately to persist in declining the hospitality which at the mill she had accepted with so much good-will.

She was still resisting the ceremonious importunities of the farmer's wife when M. Bricolin entered.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE UPSTART PEASANT.

M. BRICOLIN was a man of about fifty years of age, robust, and of a tolerable figure. The *embonpoint* which had encroached upon his person is not unusual among country people, who, passing their days in a salubrious air, most frequently on horseback during the fine weather, and leading an active but not exhausting life, have just enough of fatigue to preserve the exuberance of their health and the soundness of their appetite. Owing to the stimulants of free air and lively exercise, these men support the daily excesses of the table for a time with impunity; and while, in their rural occupations, they are dressed in a style very little different from the peasant, it is impossible to confuse the two classes, even at the first glance While the peasant is always thin, well-proportioned, and of a sunburnt complexion, which is not without its beauty, the *bourgeois* of the country are generally, at the age of forty, afflicted with coarse corpulency, a step dull, slow, and heavy, and a flushed and heated colour, sufficient at once to vulgarize and disfigure the finest organization.

Among those who have been the founders of their own fortunes, and have commenced their lives by practising the enforced temperance of the peasant, we find few exceptions to this expansion of form and alteration of complexion. It is a proverbial observation, that when the peasant gives unrestrained liberty to his appetite, and takes as much wine as he feels inclined to do, he soon becomes enfeebled and incapable of exertion; and that, if he were to return to the early habits of his life, such a course would only serve to debilitate him still further and accelerate his death. It may even be said that the money which the peasants acquire passes into their blood, that they attach themselves to it body and soul, and that either life or reason must give way if their fortune should be lost. All ideas of humanity and devotion, all religious impressions, are incompatible with the transformation which prosperity works in their physical and moral being; yet it would be useless to feel indignant against them: as long as cause produces effect, they cannot be otherwise. They pamper themselves until they arrive at a climax—either at apoplexy or imbecility. Their faculties for the acquisition and preservation of wealth, at their first outset very strongly exercised and developed, become extinguished about the middle of their career; and, after having made fortunes with remarkable

rapidity and ability, in the possession of their prosperity they as speedily sink into apathy, dissipation, and incapacity. They are no longer supported by a social principle or a progressive moral sentiment. Digestion becomes the affair of their lives; and their riches, so eagerly acquired, almost before they can become consolidated, are involved in a thousand embarrassments and compromised by a thousand sorts of mismanagement, without speaking of the vanity which precipitates them into speculations beyond their ability; and this last species of miscarriage is so frequent that most of the persons who have acquired wealth in this way are generally ruined at the very moment when they are exciting the greatest amount of envy.

M. Bricolin had not yet arrived at this stage. He was at an age when activity and determination in all their vigour can yet struggle against the double intoxication of pride and intemperance. But it was sufficient to see his bloodshot eyes, his excessive rotundity, his shining nose, and the nervous tremor which the habit of *le coup du matin*—that is to say, taking his two bottles of white wine instead of coffee—gave to his robust hand, to foretell the approaching time when this man, so active, so energetic, such an early riser, so full of forethought, so provident, so assiduous in business, would lose health, memory, judgment, and even the firmness of his mind, become an exhausted drunkard, an unwieldy babbler, and a master very easy to deceive.

His person had once been handsome, though absolutely destitute of any marks of distinction. The strongly marked expression of his countenance bespoke an energy and determination of purpose but seldom met with. He had a harsh black eye, a sensual mouth, a low and narrow forehead, frizzled hair, and his usual mode of speaking was sharp, short, and abrupt. Certainly he could not be charged with displaying falsehood in his looks or hypocrisy in his manners. He was not a deceitful man, and the great respect which he had for *mine* and *thine* rendered him incapable of trickery. Besides, the fact of being a cynic in his selfishness prevented him from disguising his intentions; and when he said, "My interest is contrary to yours," he thought he had demonstrated that he acted in accordance with his most sacred duty, and that he had performed an act of heroism in declaring it.

Demi-bourgeois, demi-manant, he wore on Sundays the mixed costume of a peasant and a gentleman. The crown of his hat was lower than that of the one, and the brim narrower than that of the other. His dress was a grey blouse, plaited in round the waist, which gave his form the appearance of a hooped hogshead. To complete the description, his gaiters exhaled an inexhaustible stable odour, and his black silk cravat was shining with grease.

This short, rough-looking personage made an unfavourable impression on Marcelle; and his prolix conversation, always

turning upon his money, made him accord still less with her feelings than did even the officious disagreeableness of his better-half.

For about a couple of hours, Madame de Blanchemont found herself obliged to submit to the vulgar boasting of Master Bricolin. She learned from him, during their conversation, that her property was encumbered with a mortgage for more than one-third of its value. The late baron had yet further required considerable advances of rents, and these sums had been augmented by the enormous interest M. Bricolin had found himself compelled to exact on account of the difficulty of procuring the money, and also because of the heavy usury-tax established in the country. Madame de Blanchemont found that she must submit to conditions still more harsh if she intended to pursue the same system which had been practised by her husband, and which she had unconsciously authorised; otherwise, before she could expect to receive any part of her income, she must pay up all the arrears, both capital and interest, and even compound interest, which had accumulated to more than a hundred thousand francs. Then, as for the other creditors, she must either pay them in full or give them good security. She found it necessary, therefore, either to sell the estate or to find the means of procuring an adequate capital. To sum up all, the property was valued at eight hundred thousand francs, and it was encumbered with a debt of four hundred thousand, without taking that of M. Bricolin into account. There remained, then, about three hundred thousand francs as Madame de Blanchemont's future fortune, independently of whatever her husband might or might not have left to her son, and respecting which she was yet in entire ignorance.

Marcelle was far from expecting to find her affairs in so disastrous a condition, as she had not foreseen one-half of the extent of this ruin. The creditors had not yet sent in their claims, and, their debts being well secured, they were awaiting the result, M. Bricolin the first, for the widow to inform herself of her real position before they demanded either the payment of the whole mass of debts, or else that they should continue to receive the income of the estate on the security of which those various sums had been borrowed. When she demanded of M. Bricolin the reason why, during the month that she had been a widow, she had not been made acquainted with the real state of her affairs, he replied with a sort of brutal frankness, that there was no occasion for any haste or urgency, that her credit was good, and that every day of indifference on the part of the proprietor was a day of profit for the tenant, during which the interest of his money was accumulating without risk. This summary sort of reasoning very speedily enlightened Marcelle respecting the nature of M. Bricolin's morality.

"Just so," she replied with an ironical smile, which the

former did not condescend to understand; "I see that it will be my own fault if I suffer further time to glide away and devour more of the income to which I believe I may still make some pretension. But, for the sake of my son, I ought to put a stop to this species of melting away, and I expect to receive from you, M. Bricolin, good advice on the subject."

M. Bricolin, very much surprised at the calmness with which Madame de Blanchemont heard that she was almost ruined, and still more at the confidence with which she consulted him, stared at her, and saw in her countenance a sort of malicious defiance, while she was opposing only the most perfect candour to his mercenary spirit.

"I see very clearly," said he, "that you will tempt me, but I cannot expose myself to the reproaches of your family. It does an injury to a man to be accused of interested complaisance and of granting usurious loans. It is necessary, Madame de Blanchemont, that I should speak to you seriously; but here the walls are too thin, and there is no occasion for what I have to say to you to be noised abroad. If you will make a pretence of coming with me to examine the old château, I will tell you, in the first place, what I would advise you to do if I were your relation; and, secondly, what I desire you to do, being your creditor; and you can see if there is any third way to examine, but I think not."

If the old château had not been overgrown with nettles, surrounded with pools of stagnant and fetid water; if it had not been overspread with a thousand heaps of mutilated rubbish, which gave it the appearance of a barbarous wilderness, it would have presented the aspect of a ruin of olden times sufficiently picturesque. Its moat was filled with luxuriant rushes, and the battlements were overgrown with ivy, while among the clefts the wild cherry had attained a magnificent development. In this view it even lacked not poetry. As they pursued their way, M. Bricolin showed to Marcelle the apartment which her husband had been accustomed to occupy in his passing visits. In this chamber there was a remnant of furniture of the date of Louis XVI. very much faded and out of order; yet still the place was habitable, and Madame de Blanchemont determined to sojourn in it throughout the night.

"That will go against the wishes of my wife, who expects to have the honour of receiving you herself," said M. Bricolin; "but I know of nothing more tiresome than to torment people. If the old château pleases you, there is no occasion to dispute about taste, as people say, and your things shall be brought here. They can put up a girth-bed in this cabinet for your maid. In the mean time, I will talk to you seriously about your affairs: that is most pressing, Madame de Blanchemont."

And drawing a chair towards him, Bricolin installed himself in it, and thus commenced:—

"And, first of all, allow me to ask if you possess any other

property than the Blanchemont estate? I believe not, if I am well informed."

"I myself have none other," calmly replied Marcelle

"And do you think that your son will inherit a great fortune in right of his father?"

"I am ignorant on that subject. If M. de Blanchemont's estates are as much involved as my own ——"

"And you really do not know? You have never taken any interest in your own affairs! That is curious! but all great people are alike. But for my part I am obliged to understand your position. It is both my business and my interest. So, then, seeing that M. de Blanchemont was living at a great rate, and not foreseeing that he should die so young, it was a matter of necessary prudence for me to ascertain what breaches he had made in his fortune, in order to be upon my guard that the sums of money I was advancing should not exceed the value of the estate here, and leave me liable to loss. I have therefore taken a great deal of trouble, and I know, almost to a sou, all that is left *au jour d'aujourd'hui*, for your little good man."

"Do me the favour to make me understand you clearly, M. Bricolin?"

"That is very easy, and you can put it to the proof. I shall not make any great mistake—at least in not more than ten thousand francs, I dare say, even if so much as that Your husband had, at the beginning of his life, a fortune of about a million of francs, which might still have remained if there had not been some nine hundred and eighty or ninety thousand francs of debts to pay."

"According to your account my son has nothing left?" said Marcelle, not without some concern at the intelligence.

"That is the state of the case. With what you have left he will still some day possess three hundred thousand francs. That is a very pretty thing, if you can only keep it clear. In land, that would be worth six or seven thousand livres a-year. If you live upon the principal, all the more agreeable."

"I have no intention of destroying my son's future prospects. My duty is to reduce as much as possible the embarrassments in which I find myself involved."

"In that case, listen. Your estates and his bring in two per cent You pay five-and-twenty per cent. interest on your debts; the accumulation of the interest will go on augmenting the capital of the debt beyond all limitation. What had you better do, in your own opinion?"

"I suppose it will be necessary to sell, will it not?"

"As you please. I certainly think it would be for your advantage, only that, as you would for a long time have the control of your son's property, you might prefer to profit from the confusion, and enjoy your share."

"No, M. Bricolin, such is not my intention."

"But you could yet draw money from this property, and as

the child has still an inheritance to expect from his grand parents, he would not be bankrupt even at the end of his minority."

"That is well argued," said Marcelle coldly, "but I shall act very differently. I shall sell everthing, in order that the debts of the succession may not exceed its capital; and then as to my own fortune, I will collect it together, in order to have the means of giving my son a suitable education."

"In that case you will sell Blanchemont?"

"Yes, M. Bricolin, immediately."

"Immediately! Oh, I agree with you there. When people are in your situation, and wish to get out of it at once, there is not a day to lose, because every day makes a hole in the purse. But do you think it will be very easy to sell an estate of this importance immediately, either as a whole or divided into parts? Anybody might as well think that it would be as easy to build a château like this, strong enough to stand five or six hundred years, as to get rid of it with so little difficulty. You must remember that now-a-days people will only vest their capital in business, in the railroads, or in such like great concerns, where they may either gain cent per cent or lose it all Then, again, landed property is a very difficult thing to have to deal with. In our part of the country every body wishes to sell, and nobody wants to buy, so much are people disgusted with the idea of sowing a great capital in the furrows of an estate from which they can only reap a very slender income. It is all very well when people live upon their own property, because they can do it economically, as a countryman like myself can manage to do; but for you, and others like you, who have been used to a town life, you could scarcely gain a livelihood from it. Then again, perhaps you might find a purchaser readily enough among people like myself for an estate of about fifty, or perhaps a hundred thousand francs in value; but when you come to a property worth eight hundred thousand francs, that generally exceeds our means, and you must look for a capitalist in the office of your solicitor at Paris, who does not know what to do with his money. And do you think there are many such now-a-days, when people speculate so much on the stock-exchange, in lotteries, in railroads, and a thousand other great concerns? Well, then, you must look out for some timid old nobleman, who prefers placing his money out at two per cent. in the fear of a revolution, rather than launching out in these fine speculations which tempt all the world *au jour d'aujourd'hui*. Then, again, you must remember that such old nobleman would want a fine house, in which he might come and end his days But you see your château! I would not give the price of its materials for it. It would not pay for the expense of pulling it down, every part of it is so rotten and decayed. So, then, if you put your estate up for sale, you may perhaps meet with a purchaser for it altogether some of these days, but it is equally likely that you may

have to wait these ten years; for though your solicitor may print upon his placards, according to custom, that it will bring in three or three and a-half per cent, yet when they look into my lease, as they are sure to do, they will soon discover then, when the taxes are deducted, that it will not bring in two."

"The conditions of your lease have perhaps been granted on account of the advances which you have made to M. de Blanchemont?" said Marcelle with a smile.

"As was only just," replied Bricolin with an air of determination. "My lease is for twenty years. One is passed, and nineteen remain. You must know that very well, because you signed it. After all, perhaps you did not read it; but if you did not it was your own fault."

"I do not charge any one with blame. Well, then, if I cannot sell the whole estate in one, I must do it divided into parts."

"Yes, in parts you may sell it very easily; you may sell it at a good price too, but nobody will ever pay you."

"Why not?"

"Because you will be obliged to sell to so many people, of whom the greater part will not be solvent; to the peasants, who at the best only pay sou by sou at a time, who are nearly beggars, and are tempted to keep themselves so for the sake of possessing a little land, as they all do *au jour aujourd'hui*, and you will have to expel them at the end of ten years without having received any of the income in the meantime. That would certainly torment you and tire you out."

"And I could never resolve to do so. So then, M. Bricolin, according to your account, I can neither keep this property nor part with it."

"If you like to be reasonable, and not ask too high a price, and would wish to receive the reckoning at once, you could sell it to somebody that I know."

"To whom?"

"To me."

"To you, M. Bricolin?"

"To me, Nicolas Etienne Bricolin."

"By the way," said Marcelle, recollecting at that moment some words which had escaped from the Miller of Angibault, "I have heard something of this before. And what are your proposals?"

"I will myself make arrangements for your creditors and the holders of the mortgages; I will portion out the land, and buy of one here and sell to another there; I will keep what is reasonable, and pay over the rest into your hands."

"And the creditors, do you mean to pay their accounts also? You must be immensely rich, M. Bricolin!"

"No, I should make them wait, and in one way or another I should relieve you from every embarrassment."

"I believe that they all desire to be reimbursed immediately, and you certainly told me so."

"They would be urgent with you, but they would give me credit."

"Quite right. Perhaps I pass for being insolvent?"

"Possibly. *Au jour d'aujourd'hui* people are very mistrustful. Come, Madame de Blanchemont, you owe me one hundred thousand francs; I will give you two hundred and fifty thousand, and we will cry quits."

"That is to say, you will pay two hundred and fifty thousand francs for that which is worth three hundred thousand?"

"That is a little *bonus* which it is only right that you should give me. You see this is my advantage, having money by me. It is to your advantage also, because you will receive your fortune at once, but if you delay you will never touch a sou."

"And thus you would take advantage of my embarrassing situation, to deduct one-sixth from the little which I have left."

"It is very right, and anybody else would consider himself entitled to a great deal more. Be satisfied that I am taking as much care of your interest as I possibly can. Come, my first word shall be my last. You will think about it."

"Yes, M. Bricolin, it appears to me to be necessary that I should think."

"Yes, I think so too. It is necessary, besides, that you should be satisfied that I am not deceiving you, and that I am not deceived myself respecting your situation, and the value of your property. You are here, and you can get every information for yourself, and see everything for yourself. You can even go and visit the estate of your husband on the côté du Blanc, and when you shall have seen everything, and thought of everything, in about a month you can give me your answer. Only it is in this way, that you must form your calculation, which is established on a basis which proves itself; and, first on one side, you can sell all that remains of your property for nearly double the amount of what I offer you; but you cannot touch the half, and you will even have to wait ten years, during which time you will find yourself compelled to submit to pay so much interest that nothing will be left: but, secondly, on the other hand you can sell to me at the loss of a sixth part, and receive into your own hand, within three months, two hundred and fifty thousand francs in good gold or silver, or pretty bank notes, as you like best. There! I have said it! Now come back to the house in a little less than an hour, and dine with us. When you are with us, you must do as we do, Madame la Baronne. We are upon business, and if you ask me for anything else, it will not matter."

The position in which Marcelle found herself while in connexion with the Bricolins took away all scruples, and compelled her also to accept his offer. She agreed, therefore, to accept his invitation; but requested while waiting the appointed dinner hour to remain in the old chateau, that she might write a letter; and M. Bricolin left her promising to send her servants to her with the packages which they had brought.

CHAPTER IX.

AN UNEXPECTED FRIEND.

DURING some few moments in which Marcelle remained alone, she rapidly made a great many reflections, and she soon became sensible that it was love which was inspiring her with an energy of which she might not have been capable without that all-potent inspiration. The first appearance of that dull and deserted dwelling, which was now the only abode which she could call her own, had occasioned her a little alarm; but in learning that even this ruin might very soon pass into the possession of another, she began to smile as she inspected it with a completely disinterested curiosity, although the armorial escutcheon of her family still proudly crowned its walls.

"Thus," said she, "every connection that bound me to the past will soon be torn away and trampled down! Fortune and rank will become extinct together—*au jour d'aujourd'hui*, as this Bricolin would say. Yet, oh! how good is the Divine Being in having made love for all times, and as immortal as himself!"

Suzette now entered, bringing those travelling requisites for writing which her mistress had desired. In opening them, Marcelle by chance cast her eyes upon her maid, and found her contemplating the bare walls of the old castle with so strange an expression that she could not refrain from laughing. The countenance of Suzette at once darkened, and her voice assumed a tone of very marked rebellion.

"Pray, madam," said she, "are you resolved to sleep here?"

"Certainly I am," replied Marcelle; "and here is a room for you with a magnificent prospect and plenty of air."

"I am very much obliged to you, madam; but, madam, you may rest assured that I will not sleep there. The place frightens me in broad day, but what would it be at night? They say that spirits walk here, and I have no difficulty in believing it."

"You are foolish, Suzette. I will defend you against these hobgoblins."

"Perhaps you will have the goodness, madam, to get some of the servants from the farm to sleep by you here, for I would rather be going away directly, even if it must be on foot, to get out of this frightful country."

"You take it very tragically, Suzette. I constrain you to nothing—you can sleep wherever you please. However, I must observe to you, that if you make a practice of refusing

me your services, I shall be under the necessity of separating myself from you."

"If you intend, madam, to remain a long time in this country, and live in this ruin ——"

"I shall be obliged to remain here a month, and perhaps longer. What is your conclusion?"

"I must request that you will send me back to Paris, or else to some other of your estates, madam, for I could take my oath that I should die here at the end of three days."

"My dear Suzette," replied Marcelle, with great sweetness and gentleness of manner, "I have no longer any other estate left me but this, and most probably I shall never return to live at Paris. I have no fortune now, my child, and it is possible that I could not long have retained you in my service. Since stopping here is so disagreeable to you, it would be useless for me to impose it on you even for a day. I will pay you your wages and your travelling expenses. Fortunately the *patache* which brought us here has not departed, and you can return in it. I will give you a good character, and my relations will assist in finding you another place."

"But how can I travel in this way alone? What a miserable thing to be brought so far away into such a lost and desolate place!"

"I did not know that I was ruined, and I have only this instant learned it myself," replied Marcelle calmly. "It is unnecessary for you to reproach me, as it was involuntarily that I have caused you this perplexity. Besides, you will not travel alone. Lapierre will return with you to Paris."

"Are you dismissing Lapierre also, madam?" exclaimed Suzette in consternation.

"I do not dismiss Lapierre. I restore him to my mother-in-law who lent him to me, and who will receive her good old servant back with pleasure. Go and dine, Suzette, and afterwards prepare for your departure."

Amazed at the coolness and the sweet composure of her mistress, Suzette burst into tears; and melting into a return of affection, she entreated her forgiveness and her permission to remain.

"No, my dear girl," replied Marcelle; "your wages are henceforth beyond my position. I regret you, notwithstanding your waywardness; and perhaps you may regret me notwithstanding my faults. It is an inevitable sacrifice, and this moment is not one for weakness."

"But what will become of you, madam, without fortune, without servants, with a child in your arms, and in a place like a desert? Poor little Edward!"

"Do not distress yourself, Suzette; you will certainly soon find a situation among some of my acquaintance. This is not our last meeting, and you will see Edward again. Do not weep before him, I beg of you."

Suzette took her departure, but Marcelle had not yet dipped

her pen in the ink when the Miller made his appearance, carrying little Edward on one arm, and a *sac de nuit* on the other.

"Ah," said Marcelle, receiving her child, whom he gently placed upon her knee, "you are always occupied in doing something to oblige me. M. Louis, I am very glad that you have not yet gone, for I have not thanked you, and I should have been sorry not to have said adieu."

"No, I am not yet gone," replied the miller; "and to tell you the truth, I am not very desirous of going. But stay, madam, if it be all the same to you, do not call me *monsieur* any more. I am not a gentleman, and why such ceremony on your part? Call me plain Louis, or Grand-Louis, like all the rest of the world."

"But I must say to you that this would be very contrary to your ideas of general equality, and that after your observations of this morning——"

"This morning I was a brute—a horse, a mill-horse, which is worse! I had my prejudices against you, on account of your rank and your husband. How could I know any better? If you had called me Louis, I believe that I should have called you—what is your name?"

"Marcelle."

"I like that name, Madame Marcelle. Ah, well, I shall always call you by it. That will never remind me of M. le Baron."

"But if I am not to call you *monsieur*, why not call me simply Marcelle?" said Madame de Blanchemont, laughing.

"No, no, you are a woman, and such a woman as we seldom see. But stay, why should I hide it?—you have taken possession of my heart within the last minute."

"Why, within the last minute, Grand-Louis?" said Marcelle, who having begun to write only half heard the miller.

"Just now while you were talking to your maid, I was on the staircase with your merry little boy, who was playing a thousand roguish tricks to prevent me from coming up, and in spite of myself I heard all that you said. I am sure, I beg your pardon for doing so."

"There was not the least harm in it," said Marcelle. My position is not a secret, since I have made it known to Suzette, and besides I am certain that a secret would be very safe in your hands."

"A secret of yours would be in my heart," replied the Miller, with a softened manner. "Ah, then, you did not know before you came here that you were ruined!"

"No, indeed I did not. It is M. Bricolin, who has given me the information. I expected to hear of losses, but not irreparable ones."

"And you are not in any greater grief than this?"

Marcelle, who was occupied in writing, did not consider a reply necessary; but in the space of a moment she lifted up

her eyes, and saw Grand-Louis standing before her with crossed arms, contemplating her with a species of simple enthusiasm and profound astonishment.

"Is it then so wonderful," said she, "to see a person lose a fortune without losing one's spirits? Besides, have I not sufficient left for all the requisites of life."

"What you have left I know to be very little. I am better acquainted with your affairs than you can be yourself, for when father Bricolin has had a cup or two of wine he loves to chat; and he has worried me to death with telling me all about these affairs, when I was very little interested in hearing them. But was there ever anything to equal this! Here is a person who can see, without even knitting her brows, a million on one side, and half a million on the other, going away from her in a crack—in the twinkling of an eye! I never saw anything like it, and I don't understand it yet."

"But you will understand it still less, if I tell you that as far as I am concerned, all this gives me extreme pleasure."

"Ah! but with respect to your son," said the miller, lowering his voice, that the child who was playing near them might not hear his words.

"At the first moment I was a little shocked on his account," replied Marcelle; "but I soon consoled myself. For a long time I have believed that it is a misfortune to be born to riches, to be destined to idleness, to the hatred of the poor, and to all the selfishness and impunities of wealth. Often have I regretted that I was not the daughter and the mother of a labourer. Now, Louis, I shall be one of the people, and men like you will no longer mistrust me."

"You will not be of the people," said the miller. "You have still a fortune left, which a man of the people would look upon as immense, while it is no great thing in your consideration. Besides, this little child has relations, who will not leave him to be brought up like one of the poor. All this, Madame Marcelle, is only a little romance which you are contriving. But where have you got these ideas? You ought to be a saint. It has a singular effect upon me to hear you say all these extraordinary things, when all other rich people only dream of becoming more rich. You are the first of your sort that I have ever seen. In Paris are there any other of the rich and the noble who think like you?"

"There are but a few who think as I do; but I must not take much merit to myself, Grand-Louis. The day may come when I may perhaps be able to make you understand the nature of my sentiments."

"Excuse me; but perhaps I understand them now."

"No."

"Yes, but the proof is something which I must not venture to mention. These are delicate affairs, and perhaps you will be telling me that I am too bold to be questioning you about them. If you knew me, however, as well as I am known over

the country here, you would believe that I am not only bashful, but capable of understanding the sorrows of others from my own. I will confess to you the cause of my own anxiety, I will tell you all. Only you and my mother shall share my confidence. Perhaps you will say a few kind words that will inspire me with fresh courage."

"And if I say to you in my turn, that I think I can guess your secret?"

"It may be so, for money and love are mixed up in all these affairs."

"I am desirous that you should admit me into your confidence, Grand-Louis. But see, here is Lapierre coming up. We shall soon meet again, shall we not?"

"It is necessary that we should," said the miller, lowering his voice, "for I have a great deal to ask you respecting your business with Bricolin. I am afraid that roguish fellow will drive you a little too hard, and who knows, peasant though I am, if I may not be able to render you some service? Will you treat me like a friend?"

"Certainly."

"And do nothing without telling me?"

"I promise you, my friend. Here is Lapierre."

"Is it necessary that I should go?"

"Go here on one side with Edward. I may perhaps find it necessary to consult you, if you have time to wait a few minutes longer."

"It is Sunday; and, besides, if it were any other day——"

CHAPTER X.

LETTER-WRITING.

Lapierre entered. Suzette had already told him all. He was pale and trembling. Being old and incapable of any great exertion, he had only been useful to Marcelle as a sort of travelling protection. But, without having made any great professions, he was sincerely attached to her; and, notwithstanding the aversion which he as well as Suzette already experienced to the Black Valley and the old château, he refused to leave his mistress, and declared that he would serve her for as little a remuneration as her change of circumstances rendered it convenient to give.

Marcelle, touched by this disinterested zeal, pressed his hand affectionately, and overcame his resistance by proving to him that he could be more useful to her by returning to Paris than remaining at Blanchemont. She had determined upon relinquishing all the costly appendages by which she had been surrounded, and Lapierre was very capable of managing their

sale—of receiving the proceeds, and devoting them to the payment of the little current debts which Madame de Blanchemont had left behind her at Paris. Honest and clever Lapierre was flattered with having to play the part of a steward and confidential man, and, at the same time, to render himself useful to her whom he was leaving with so much regret. The arrangements for his departure were soon made; and at this point Marcelle, who thought of all the details of her position with a coolness that was remarkable, recalled Grand-Louis from the little cabinet, and asked him if he thought it possible for them to sell in the country the carriage which she had left at ——.

"But that would be cutting off your retreat from amongst us," replied the miller. "All the better for us! Perhaps you will remain among us, and I ask nothing but to take care of you. I often go to —— upon business of my own, and to see one of my sisters who lives there. I know almost everything that passes in that part of the country; and I see very clearly that all our *bourgeois*, of late years, have acquired a rage for fine carriages and all sorts of luxuries. I know one who wishes to have a carriage sent from Paris; that of yours is here already, and so it would save the expense of the journey; and in our country we commit great extravagances, and yet think a great deal of little savings. That carriage of yours appeared to me both good and handsome. How much would such an affair as that cost?"

"Two thousand francs."

"Would you like me to go with M. Lapierre as far as ——? Perhaps I could take him to a purchaser. He could receive the money, for in our part nobody pays ready cash but to strangers."

"If it would not be trespassing both upon your time and your kindness, you could manage the affair alone."

"I will do it with pleasure; but do not mention it to M. Bricolin, for he would directly wish to buy the carriage himself."

"Ah, indeed! But why should he not?"

"Ah, well! only its possession would not fail to turn the head of—everybody in his family. Besides, Bricolin would persuade you to take half of what it is worth. I tell you I will undertake this affair myself."

"In that case, if it is possible, you must bring the money to me; for I expected to have received some here, and, without doubt, I shall have it demanded of me instead."

"We will set off to-night. It will be no hindrance to me as it is Sunday; and if I am not back by to-morrow night, or the morning after, with two thousand francs, take me for a boaster."

"You are very good!" said Marcelle, contrasting his disinterested kindness with the rapacity of the rich farmer.

"I must also bring you your luggage, which you left at ——," said Grand-Louis.

"If you would engage a cart, and send it to me——"

"No, no. What good would it do to hire a man and a horse? I shall put Sophia into my cart; and I fancy that Mademoiselle Suzette would like better to travel in the open air, on a bundle of straw, with a good conductor like me, than with that ill-tempered fellow in his salad-basket. Stay! I have something else to say. You must have a servant. Those of M. Bricolin are too busy to amuse your merry little fellow from morning to night. Oh! if I had time myself, we should lead a fine life together, for I adore children, especially such a spirited one. I will send my mother's servant, little Fanchon, to you. We can go on very well without her for some time. She will take as much care of your child as the apple of her eye, and will do everything you tell her. She has only one fault, and that is, she will say 'if you please' three times over every time you speak to her. But what of that? she thinks she is very polite; and if anybody scolds her, she pretends to be deaf."

"You are sent to me by Providence," said Marcelle, "and I cannot but wonder and admire that, in a situation involving so many embarrassments, I should find in my way so kind a heart, ready to come to my help."

"Bah! bah! these are only little friendly services, that you would do for me in the same way. You have already greatly served me without knowing it, since you came here."

"How was that?"

"Ah! we will talk of that another time," said the miller, with a mysterious air, and with a smile, in which the seriousness of his passion formed a strange contrast with the hilarity of his character.

The departure of the miller and the two servants having been resolved upon, by common consent, to be at the same time on the same evening—*à la fraiche*, as Grand-Louis said—Marcelle, not having more than a few minutes left for writing previous to the dinner hour at the farm, rapidly traced the two following letters:—

LETTER THE FIRST.

Marcelle, Baroness of Blanchemont, to the Countess of Blanchemont, her mother-in-law.

My dear Mamma,—I address myself to you as the most courageous of women, and the strongest minded of our family, to announce to you, and to commission you to announce to the respected count, and our other dear relatives, some news which I am certain will affect you more than it does me. You have often made me participate in your apprehensions; and we have had many conversations on the subject which occupies me at this moment, and which you will understand with very little explanation. Nothing is left (really nothing) of Edward's fortune. Of my own there remain two hundred and fifty or three hundred thousand francs. I have only yet learned my situation from a man whose interest it is to exaggerate my difficulties, if that is possible, but who has too much good sense to attempt to deceive me, since to-morrow, or the day after, I can investigate these things myself. I send the good Lapierre

to you, and I need not ask you to receive him kindly back again. You gave him to me that he might introduce a little order and economy into the domestic arrangements of our establishment. He did what he could; but of what importance would domestic savings be within doors, while abroad the prodigality was without control or limits? Those little reasons, which he will best explain to you himself, have obliged me to hurry his departure. It is on this account that I write to you in haste, and without waiting to enter into details which are not yet in my possession, and which I shall acquire by degrees. I have desired Lapierre to obtain an interview with you alone, to place this in your hands, in order that you may have some hours, or even some days, to prepare the mind of the count for receiving this intelligence. You will soften it to him, repeating to him, a thousand times over, everything that you know of my character—how really indifferent I am to the enjoyments of wealth, and how utterly incapable I am of cursing either that which is present or that which is past. Now, shall I not pardon that to him whose misfortune it has been not to have lived long enough to repair it? Dear mamma, let his memory receive from your heart and from mine an entire and willing forgiveness.

Now let me say two words for Edward and for myself, who are united in this destiny. I hope I still have the ability to provide everything that is necessary for his education. He is not of an age to afflict himself for losses which he is not able to comprehend, and it will be better to keep him in ignorance as long as possible, when he is able to appreciate them. Is it not a happiness that this change in his position has come to pass before he has acquired a taste for the enjoyments of wealth? If it be a misfortune to be reduced to the necessaries of life—which in my eyes it is not—happening thus in his early childhood, he will not feel it so; and, accustomed as he will henceforth be to a modest style of living, he will believe himself sufficiently wealthy. Since he was destined to fall into a condition of mediocrity, it is through the benevolence of Providence that he has been made to descend at an age when the lesson, far from being bitter, must necessarily be beneficial. You will tell me that he has other inheritances that he may look forward to possessing. Such possibilities ought not to be taken into account, still less are their profits to be anticipated. I should refuse, almost as an affront, the sacrifices which his family would impose upon themselves to support what they would consider my honourable position in life. Anticipating what has now really come to pass, I have already laid my plans for my future conduct. I shall conform myself to these arrangements, and nothing in the world shall make me deviate from them I am resolved to establish myself in some remote province in the depths of the country, where I can habituate the early years of my son to a simple and laborious life, where he may not behold the luxurious life of the rich, nor come in contact with those who might destroy the good effect of my lessons and examples. I shall not lose the hope of coming to present him to you at some future time; and it will be a pleasure to you to behold a healthy and happy boy, instead of the weak and shadowy creature for whose existence we have never ceased to tremble. I know the rights which you have over him, and the respect which I owe to your advice and authority; but I hope you will not disapprove my project, and that you will leave his infancy to my charge, since it is the period during which the assiduous cares of a mother, and the salutary influence of the country, will be more advantageous to him than the superficial lessons of a liberally paid professor, the exercises of the riding-school, or carriage-drives in the Bois de Boulogne. For my own part I entreat you not to be uneasy for me, for I feel that I need not much regret my life of supineness and the dulness of my neighbourhood. My love of the country amounts to a passion; and I shall occupy the long hours which the world can no more steal from me in gaining instruction for myself, that I

may instruct my son. Hitherto you have reposed some confidence in me, and the time has now come when that confidence must be entire. I reckon confidently on this; for I know you have but to interrogate your own energetic mind, and your profoundly maternal heart, fully to comprehend my designs and resolutions.

All this must necessarily meet with some opposition in our family; but when you have declared your sanction, and that you consider my conduct right and reasonable, all else will be of your opinion. I commit, therefore, our present and our future destiny into your hands; and I am, with devotion, tenderness, and respect, yours for my life,

MARCELLE.

Then followed a postscript relative to Suzette, and a request that the family solicitor might be sent to Blanchemont, in order to investigate the ruin of that old ancestral property, and take suitable and active measures for the arrangement of its liabilities As for the personal affairs, Marcelle would settle these herself, with the help of competent men in the locality.

Her second letter was addressed to Henry Lémor:—

Henry, what happiness! what joy!—I am ruined! You can never again reproach me with my wealth; you need no longer hate my golden chains My situation is changed, and I am become a woman that you may love without remorse, and who has no longer the power of imposing any sacrifices upon herself for you. My son has no rich inheritance to receive, at least immediately. Henceforth I have the right of bringing him up as you would desire, and, in training him up to maturity, of entrusting his education, and delivering up his entire mind to you. I will not deceive you: we may perhaps have to sustain a little struggle against the family of his father, whose blind tenderness and aristocratic pride would restore him to the world, by enriching him in spite of me. But we shall triumph with gentleness, a little address, and a great deal of firmness. I shall withdraw myself to such a distance from them as may paralyse their influence, and we shall surround with a sweet influence the development of his young soul. We will repeat the infancy of Jupiter in the depths of the sacred grottoes; and when he shall leave that divine retreat to try his strength—when riches come to tempt him—we shall have formed a spirit strong against the seductions of the world and the corruptions of gold. Henry, I flatter myself with these sweet hopes, and I charge you not to disappoint them with cruel doubts and scruples, which I shall call pusillanimous. You owe me your support and protection, now that I find myself isolated from a family full of kindness and solicitude, but which I give up, and combat against, for the single reason that they do not participate in your principles. That which I wrote to you on leaving Paris, two days ago, is therefore fully and easily confirmed by my present letter. I do not summon you to come to me now—I ought not. It is necessary that we should remain apart for a suitable length of time, lest the exile I have imposed upon myself should be attributed to my sentiments towards you. I do not tell you the place which I shall choose for my retreat, because I am yet in ignorance where it will be; but in a year, Henry, dear Henry, counting from the fifteenth of August, come and join me wherever I shall have fixed to call you. Until then, if you do not partake my confidence in myself, I should even wish you not to write to me. But shall I have strength to live a year without knowing anything of you? Oh, no!—neither would you. Write these two words, only to say, "I live, and I love!" and you can address them for me to my old and faithful Lapierre, at

the Hôtel de Blanchemont. Adieu, Henry! Oh! if you could read my heart, and see how much better I am than you think me! Edward is well, and does not forget you. Henceforth he is the only one to whom I can speak of you.

M. B.

Having sealed these two letters, Marcelle, who had no other vanity in the world, saving in the angelic beauty of her boy, refreshed Edward's toilet in some slight degree, and crossed the court to the farm. They were waiting dinner, and to do her honour the table had been arranged in the *salon*, as they had no other dining-room besides the kitchen, where they had no occasion to fear spoiling the furniture, and where Madame Bricolin had been very busy preparing a variety of dishes with the help of her mother-in-law and her maid. Marcelle could not fail to perceive this departure from the habits of the family. Madame Bricolin, whose officious hospitality was instinctively impressed with the vulgarity of manner which an inferior education usually engenders in her class, was not able to disguise it, but displayed it on all occasions by mistimed apologies for the confusion of her household, and the awkwardness of her servants. Marcelle required and exacted from her that she should resume the usual habits of her house on the following day, assuring her, with a good-humoured smile, that she should go and dine at the Mill of Angibault if they treated her with so much ceremony.

"And *à propos* of the mill," said Madame Bricolin, after some speeches of ill-timed politeness; "I suppose I must have a quarrel with M. Bricolin. Ah! he is just here! Tell us, then, M. Bricolin, are you out of your mind to invite the Miller to dine with us on the very day that Madame la Baronne does us the honour of sharing our repast?"

"Ah, I did not think of that!" replied the farmer, simply; "or rather, I thought when I invited the Miller that madame would not have done us the honour. You know very well that the baron always refused: he had his dinner sent to his own room, which was not very convenient, by-the-bye. In short, Thibault, if it is disagreeable for Madame de Blanchemont to eat with the Miller, you must tell him, you who don't keep your tongue in your pocket; for my part, I could not undertake it. I have been very stupid, but it must be set right at any price."

"According to custom," said the sharp Madame Bricolin, who, being the eldest daughter of a family of the name of Thibault, preserved her family name, feminized according to the ancient custom of the country—"so, then, I shall go and send your handsome Louis back to his meal-sacks."

"That would be very painful to me, and I think that I also should go at the same time," said Madame de Blanchemont in a firm tone, and with some severity of manner, which was not without its weight on the farmer's wife; "I breakfasted this morning with him at his house, and I found him so oblig-

ing, so polite, and so amiable, that it would be a real vexation to me to dine without him here to-day."

"Indeed!" exclaimed the beautiful Rose, who had listened to Marcelle with great attention, and whose animated eyes expressed surprise mingled with pleasure; but she lowered them suddenly, and became covered with blushes, on meeting the scrutinizing and menacing looks of her mother.

"It must be as Madame de Blanchemont pleases," said Madame Bricolin.

And she added in a low tone, addressing herself to her servant, who enjoyed all the privilege of her confidential observations when she was angry—

"What a thing it is to be a handsome man!"

Chounette, more familiarly called Fanchon, smiled with an air of malice that made her more ugly than usual. She thought the Miller a very handsome man, and would have seen no fault in him had he only paid his court to herself.

"Come, then," said M. Bricolin, "the Miller shall dine with us. Madame de Blanchemont is right not to be proud. It is the way to get people's good-will. Rose, go and tell Grand-Louis to come in; he is in the court outside. Say that the soup is on the table. It would have cost me something to have offended that young fellow; I tell you, Madame de Blanchemont, I have a reason for keeping on good terms with the Miller. There is nobody else who does not keep double measure, and does not change the corn that is sent to him. Yes, that's the way with the millers here. They are all thieves—one greater than the other. Besides, our country proverb says, '*Tout meunier, tout valeur:*' I have tried them all, and I have never found anybody else who did not make wrong reckonings and wicked adulterations. And, moreover, he pays us all sorts of attentions. He never grinds any wheat after rye or barley has been in the mill. He knows that it spoils it, and takes away its whiteness. He takes a pleasure in pleasing me in these things, because he knows that I like to have fine white bread upon my table. That is the only fancy that I have myself. I am mortified when any one comes to see me, if he does not say, 'Ah, what beautiful bread! There is nobody can match Master Bricolin for having fine wheat! It is all Spanish wheat, my friend, and no flattery.'"

"Your bread is certainly beautiful," said Marcelle, more to make him value the Miller than for the sake of gratifying M. Bricolin's vanity.

"Ah, well," said Madame Bricolin, "what a thing to be anxious for!—a shade of colour more or less in the bread, and for a bushel more or less in a week's measure! We have plenty of millers much nearer, and even a mill close by; what occasion then is there to do business with one who lives as far as a league away?"

"What difference can that make," said M. Bricolin, "when he comes to fetch the sacks, and brings them back again with-

out taking a grain more than a miller's fee? Besides, he has got such a capital good mill; two great new wheels, a famous reservoir, the water never fails with him, and it is pleasant not to have to wait."

"And then, as he comes such a long way," said his wife, "you think that you are always obliged to invite him to dinner or luncheon. That's your economy!"

The entrance of the Miller put a stop to these domestic discussions. When his wife scolded, M. Bricolin contented himself with shrugging his shoulders, and speaking a little more quickly than he was in the habit of doing at other times. It suited him to pass over her peevish temper, because her activity and the parsimony of her management were useful to him in the management of his house.

"Come, come, Rose," cried Madame Bricolin to her daughter, who returned with Grand-Louis, "we wait for you to take your place at table. You could have sent a message by Chounette quite as well as by running yourself."

"My father ordered me to go," said Rose.

"And you would not have come unless he had, I am very sure," said the Miller in a low voice to the young girl.

"That is all the thanks you give me for being scolded on your account," replied Rose, in the same tone.

Marcelle did not hear what was said between them; but the stolen words that were passing, the blushes of Rose, and the emotion of Grand-Louis, confirmed the suspicion which she had already conceived respecting Madame Bricolin's aversion to the poor Miller: the beautiful Rose was the object which engrossed the thoughts of the Miller of Angibault.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DINNER AT THE FARM.

Desirous of promoting the best interests of her new friend, and not foreseeing any evil consequences that could arise to Mademoiselle Bricolin from her doing so, since her father and her grandmother appeared to favour Grand-Louis, Madame de Blanchemont affected to talk to him a great deal during the repast, and led the conversation to those subjects on which his information and intelligence rendered him really very superior to all the Bricolin family, perhaps even to the charming Rose herself. In agriculture considered as a natural science rather than a commercial experiment, in politics as seeking the happiness of mankind and the rights of humanity, in religion and morals, Grand-Louis had notions, elementary indeed, but just, elevated, marked by the stamp of good

sense, of perspicuity, and nobleness of soul, which had never before been brought to light at the farm. The subjects of conversation among the Bricolins were generally grossly vulgar, and all the mental energy which was displayed took the shape of some rumoured scandal possessing but little charity towards their neighbours. Grand-Louis did not like this sort of malicious gossip, and having, consequently, seldom joined in the conversations so little to his taste, his real capacity had never excited their observation. M. Bricolin had pronounced him very stupid, like all handsome men; and Rose, who had always found him, under the influence of his feelings, timid or discontented, could only excuse his want of mind by boasting of his excellent heart. They were, therefore, at first astonished to see Madame de Blanchemont talk to him with a sort of preference, and when she had brought him to forget the bashfulness which the presence of Rose and the ill-will of her mother inspired, they were then still more astonished to hear him speak so well. Five or six times M. Bricolin, who had no suspicion of the Miller's love for his daughter, listened to him with admiration and wonder, and cried, as he struck his hand upon the table—

"You know all about that, too! Where have you fished it all up?"

"Bah! In the river!" replied Grand-Louis, gaily.

Madame de Bricolin fell into a deep silence by degrees, on witnessing the success of her enemy. She formed the resolution of herself warning M. Bricolin that very night of the discovery which she had made, or believed she had made, of the sentiments of this peasant for their *young lady*.

As for the old grandmother Bricolin, she understood no part of the conversation; but she discovered that the Miller talked like a book, because he uttered a number of consecutive phrases without hesitation, and without repetition. Rose did not appear to listen, but she lost nothing of what was said, and her eyes were involuntarily fixed upon Grand-Louis. There was also present a fifth Bricolin, to whom Marcelle had paid little attention: this was the old grandfather Bricolin, dressed like his wife in the peasant's garb, eating a great deal, but speaking not a word, and without having the appearance of thinking either. He was almost deaf, almost blind, and appeared to be completely an idiot. His ancient better-half brought him to the table, and took charge of him as of a child. She was very much engaged with him, filling his plate and his glass, supplying him with one thing, and taking away another, but never addressing a word to him, as that would have been trouble lost. When he first seated himself, she had, however, made him understand, that he must take off his hat on account of Madame de Blanchemont. He obeyed, but without appearing to comprehend the reason, and replaced it soon: a freedom which, according to the custom of the country, his son, M. Bricolin, permitted himself equally to practise. The Miller,

who had not derogated from the same fashion in the morning at the mill, now quietly pushed his cap into his pocket without being perceived, divided between the feelings of a new and instinctive interest with which Marcelle had inspired him, and the fear of playing the fop for the first time in his life.

However, even while admiring the wonderful knowledge of the Miller, M. Bricolin soon began to be of a different opinion with him on every subject. In agriculture, he pretended that there was nothing new to try, that the scientific men had never made any discoveries, that in making innovations people always ruined themselves, that, since *le monde est monde jusqu'-au jour d'aujourd'hui*, people had always done the same, and that they would never do better.

"Good!" said the Miller, "and those who first invented our present practices, those who yoked the cattle to till the earth, and sowed the seeds, they did something new, however, and they would not easily have been persuaded that a land which had never been cultivated could have become fertile. It is the same in politics; tell us, then, M. Bricolin, if they had told you a hundred years ago that you should pay neither tithes nor duties; that the convents should be destroyed ——"

"Bah! bah! It is true that perhaps I might not have believed them; but that has happened because it ought to happen. Everything is for the best, *au jour d'aujourd'hui*. All the world is at liberty to make a fortune, and they can invent nothing better than that."

"And the poor, the idle, the weak, the foolish, what are they to do?"

"They can do nothing, because they are good for nothing; all the worse for them."

"And if you were one of them, M. Bricolin, which it has not pleased God to make you (you are far from it), would you say, 'all the worse for me?' No, no, you have not said what you thought, when you answered, 'all the worse for them.' You have too much heart and too much religion for that."

"I have too much religion! I jest at religion, and so do you. I see that they are trying to restore it, but that does not disturb me much. Our priest is a *bon vivant*, and I don't contradict him. If he were a bigot, I should send him about his business. Who is there, now-a-days, that believes all these absurdities?"

"And your wife, and your mother, and your daughter; what do they say to these absurdities?"

"Oh, they are pleased, they are amused. It seems to me that they are necessary for women."

"And we, peasants—we are like the women: religion is necessary for us too."

"Ah, well! you have a religion close at hand; go to mass, I shall not hinder you, only don't force me to go there."

That may happen, too, if the religion which we have

resumes its fanatical and persecuting spirit, and returns to what it has often been before."

"Then it would be good for nothing, so down with it! I can go on without it for my part."

"But since we absolutely must have a religion, is there another that you would prefer?"

"Another? another? How you go on! Make one yourself, if you want another!"

"I would have one that would hinder men from hating, fearing, and injuring each other."

"That would be really new. I should like one of that sort that would prevent my farming men from stealing my wheat, and my workmen from taking three hours a-day to eat their soup."

"It would be so if you had a religion which commanded us to make others as happy as ourselves."

"Grand-Louis, you have true religion in your heart," said Marcelle.

"That is true indeed!" said Rose, with emotion.

M. Bricolin dared not reply. He greatly desired to gain Madame de Blanchemont's confidence, and not to inspire her with an ill opinion of him. Grand-Louis, who saw the favourable impression which he was making upon Rose, looked at Marcelle with an eye full of animation, which seemed gratefully to say, "I thank you."

The sun set and the abundant dinner drew towards a close. M. Bricolin, who grew heavy in his chair, thanks to the plentiful refreshment and the numerous bumpers which he had taken, would willingly have given himself up to his favourite pleasure, which was taking coffee flavoured with brandy and mixed with liquors for two or three hours of the evening; but Grand-Louis, on whose company he had reckoned, left the table and prepared for his departure. Madame de Blanchemont went to receive the adieus of her servants, and to settle their accounts. She entrusted to their care the letter which she had written to her stepmother; and taking the Miller aside, she confided to him that which she had addressed to Lémor, entreating him to put it into the post with his own hands.

"Rest satisfied," said he, comprehending at once that there was some little mystery in the affair; "this is not to leave my hands excepting to drop into the letter-box, and no one is to cast an eye upon it, not even your servants; is it not so that you wish it?"

"Thanks, my brave Louis!"

"Thanks! should you thank me when I ought to thank you upon my knees? Ah! you do not know how much I owe you. I leave you, but in two hours the little Fanchon shall be with you. She is more suitable and gentle than that coarse Chonnette."

When Suzette and Lapierre had really gone, Marcelle

experienced an instant of moral distress, in finding herself alone at the mercy of the Bricolin family. She felt extremely dejected, and, taking Edward by the hand, she pursued her way towards a little wood which she had observed at the other side of the field. It was yet daylight, and the sun, sinking behind the ancient château, projected afar the gigantic shadows of its lofty towers. She had not proceeded far before she was joined by Rose, who felt drawn towards her by a powerful attraction, and whose pleasing person was the only agreeable object within reach of observation at that moment.

"I will do the honours of the warren," said the young girl; "it is my favourite place, and I know you will be pleased with it."

"Pray do so. Your company alone will make me find it very agreeable," replied Marcelle, familiarly passing her arm through that of Rose.

The old manorial park of Blanchemont, cut down at the time of the Revolution, was encircled by a deep moat filled with a current of water, and by a great quickset hedge, on which Rose left many fragments of the trimmings of her muslin dress, with the carelessness and indifference of a girl whose wardrobe is well supplied. The venerable trunks of the old oaks were covered with little branches, and the warren was little more than a sort of thicket of underwood, over which reigned in their majestic pride a few old denizens of the forest, which the axe had spared, like respectable ancestors, spreading their flourishing arms over a numerous and rising posterity. Romantic footpaths ascended and descended by a succession of natural steps found in the rock, winding their varied way beneath an umbrageous shade almost excluding the light. There was a mysterious feeling hovering over the place, which might have imparted a deeper interest to one wandering freely through it, leaning on the arm of a lover. Marcelle drove away the thoughts which made her heart beat, and fell into a reverie, listening to the songs of the nightingale, the linnet, and the blackbird, which peopled that deserted and silent retirement.

The only path which had been preserved from the encroachment of the underwood was situated on the outer verge of the thicket, and had been kept open for agricultural purposes Marcelle approached it with Rose, and her child ran on before All at once he stopped and slowly retraced his steps, looking undecided, pale, and serious.

"What is there?" inquired his mother, accustomed to guess all his impressions, and seeing that he was divided between fear and curiosity.

"There is an ugly woman there," replied Edward.

"People may be ugly, and very good," replied Marcelle. "Lapierre is very good, but he is not handsome."

"Oh! Lapierre is not ugly," said Edward, who, like all children, admired the object of his affections.

"Give me your hand," replied Marcelle, "and we will go and see this ugly woman."

"No, no! do not go; it is useless," interposed Rose, with an air of trouble and embarrassment, but without manifesting much fear; "I did not think that *she* was there."

"I must accustom Edward to overcome fear," said Marcelle in a low voice. And, Rose not daring to stop her, she redoubled her pace, but when she had reached the middle of the avenue she stopped suddenly, struck with a sort of terror at the strange aspect of a being who slowly approached towards her.

CHAPTER XII.

CASTLES IN THE AIR.

UNDER the majestic arch formed by intervening branches of the noble oaks through the extent of the avenue, rich in artistic effect, from the brilliant streams of light and the contrast of deep shadows, there approached a woman, or rather a being without a name, who appeared to be plunged in wild and stern meditation. Her appearance marked her as one of those who, having become bewildered and stupified with misfortune, prove how entirely the distinguishing marks of age and sex may become obliterated. However, her regular features had once been endowed with a species of nobleness which was not yet wholly effaced, notwithstanding the frightful ravages of grief and illness; and her long black hair, escaped from the confinement of her white cap, which was surmounted by a man's straw hat, torn, bent, and broken in a thousand ways, imparted an expression somewhat sinister to a narrow and sunburnt countenance, which in a great measure it concealed and overshadowed. In that face, yellow as saffron and wasted by fever, might be seen two large black eyes of a frightful fixedness, of which the preoccupied gaze could seldom be met; a nose very straight and sufficiently finely formed, and lips livid and half open. Her dress, which was revoltingly filthy, belonged to the *bourgeois* class; a wretched robe of yellow stuff displayed a shapeless body, distorted into undue proportions, and unnatural developments of its parts, by constant stooping and strange gesticulation. Over her wasted and emaciated form floated this shapeless dress, trailing on one side, while her thin, black legs were bare, and her dirty slippers but ill defended them against the flint stones and the thorns, to which, however, they appeared to be insensible; her head hung thoughtfully down, her looks were fixed upon the ground, and her hands were perpetually occupied in rolling and unrolling a handkerchief stained with blood.

She came directly towards Madame de Blanchemont, who con-

cealed her fear that she might not communicate it to Edward, waiting with agony to see whether she would take the right hand or the left to pass by. But the spectre, for that being resembled some sinister apparition, continued her walk without appearing to notice any one; and her countenance, which did not express idiocy, but a dark despair which had passed into a stage of abstract contemplation, did not seem to receive any impression from exterior objects. However, when she reached the verge of the shadow which was projected from Marcelle, she stopped as if she had met an insurmountable obstacle, and, turning her shoulder sharply round, continued her incessant and monotonous walk. "It is poor Bricoline," said Rose, without lowering her voice, though she spoke loud enough to be heard. "It is my eldest sister, who is deranged; that is to say, an idiot. She is only thirty years old, and yet she looks like an old woman, and it is a dozen years since she has spoken a word, or even appeared to hear our voices. We do not know whether she is deaf, but certainly she is not dumb; for when she believes herself alone we sometimes hear her speaking, though without manifesting much sign of sense. She always will remain alone, and she is not malicious when she is not contradicted. Do not be afraid, and if you appear not to see her she will not even look at you. It is only when we wish to improve her personal condition that she gets angry, and shrieks, and struggles, as though we were doing her some harm."

"Mamma," said Edward, endeavouring to hide his fear, "take me back to the house, for I am hungry."

"How can you be hungry when we have just left the table?" said Marcelle, who had no more desire than her son to contemplate that sorrowful spectacle. "Surely you are mistaken. Let us go into another walk. Perhaps the sun shines too strongly here, and the heat fatigues you."

"Yes, yes; let us return into the wood," said Rose. "It is not very cheering to see this. There is no risk of her following us, and besides, when she is in one alley she very seldom turns into another. You may see that the grass is trodden down here in the middle, so often has she passed backwards and forwards, always on the same track. My poor sister, how sad this is! She was so beautiful and so good! How many times has she carried me in her arms and devoted herself to me, as you are devoting yourself to this beautiful boy! but since her misfortune she no longer knows me, nor even remembers my existence."

"Oh! my dear Mademoiselle Rose, what a terrible misfortune! And what is the cause? Is it grief or sickness? You must be acquainted with it."

"Alas! yes; we know it well, but we never speak of it."

"Forgive me if the interest I feel in you has led me to ask an improper question."

"Oh! madam, from you it is very different. It seems to

me that you are so very good, that no one need feel humbled before you. I will tell you, then, that my sister has been reduced to this unhappy state of idiocy by being crossed in love. She was attached to a young man who was amiable and honourable, but he was poor, and our parents would not consent to their union. The young man joined the army, and threw himself into the way of death at Algiers. Poor Bricoline, who from the time of his departure had remained silent and sad, which, of course, everybody attributed to depression and grief at their separation, and expected that time would remove, heard of his death in a manner that was indeed a little too cruel. My mother, believing that in losing all hope she would recover her natural tone of mind, burst on her with the bad news too suddenly, in terms too harsh, and at a time when such an emotion might have been fatal. My sister did not appear to hear, and never answered a word. I was very young, but I remember that it was winter, and we were in the middle of supper. She was holding her fork in her hand at the time, and she let it fall, and remained looking at my mother for more than a quarter of an hour, without saying a word, without lowering her eyes, and with so strange an expression that my mother was alarmed, and exclaimed—'She says nothing, but she will devour me!'

"'You should not try her so much,' said my grandmother, who is an excellent woman, and who would willingly have seen Bricoline married to her lover; 'you torment her so much that you will drive her mad.'

"My grandmother judged too well. My sister was an idiot from that moment, and from that day she has never eaten with us. She will not touch anything that we offer her; she avoids us all, and supports herself on stale remnants of food which she collects and keeps at the bottom of an old leather trunk, and takes from the kitchen when she finds an opportunity and sees that no one is there. Sometimes she snatches up a fowl, kills it, tears it to pieces with her fingers, and eats it while it is bleeding. I am sure it was for that reason that she came here to-night, for she has blood upon her fingers and her handkerchief. Then again she drags up the roots in the garden and devours them raw. In short, she lives like a savage, and frightens everybody that comes near her. This is the result of being crossed in love, and my poor parents are too severely punished for having so ill judged the heart of their child. However, they never say what they would do if it were all to come over again."

Marcelle believed that Rose was alluding to her own affairs, and feeling desirous of knowing to what extent she participated in the feelings of Grand-Louis, she encouraged her confidence in a tone of affectionate tenderness. They had now reached the side of the path opposite to that where they had met the idiot, and consequently Marcelle felt more at her ease, and little Edward had already forgot his fear, and had renewed his

gambols, without going so far as to escape from his mother's eye.

"Your mother appears to be rather strict," said Madame de Blanchemont to her companion, "and I should think M. Bricolin more indulgent."

"My father makes less noise than my mother," replied Rose, shaking her head. "He is more cheerful, more affectionate; he flourishes more, but at the same time he means to be very kind—in short he loves his children, and he is a good father. But when questions arise about money, and what he calls propriety, his determination is perhaps more inexorable than that of my mother. I have heard him say a hundred times that it is better to be dead than miserable, and that he would kill me rather than consent——"

"To your marrying according to your own will," said Marcelle, observing that Rose could not find words to convey her meaning.

"Oh, he does not say that!" replied Rose with rather a prudish air; "I have not yet thought of marriage, and I cannot tell whether my feelings and his wishes will agree. He is ambitious for me, and already torments himself with the fear of not finding a son-in-law sufficiently deserving. It is this which prevents me from making an early marriage, and I am very easy about it, for I do not wish to leave my family, notwithstanding the little outbursts of temper that I experience from my mother."

Marcelle thought that she perceived a little dissimulation on the part of Rose, and not wishing to encroach upon her confidence, she merely observed that perhaps Rose had some ambition for herself.

"Oh, not at all!" replied Rose in some confusion; "I am much richer than I wish or desire to be. As my father justly says, there being five of us—for I have two sisters and a brother married—our proportions will not be so very great when his property comes to be divided, which is all the same to me, for my tastes are simple, and I see very well from what passes among ourselves that the richer we are the poorer we are too."

"How can that be?"

"It is quite true with us and the other agriculturists like us. You, the nobility, enjoy your fortunes, and thus you get accused among us of prodigality; while those on our side, seeing the ruin of so many ancient families, say to themselves that they must be wiser, and so they begin by economising until the end—how shall I call it?—in making it a passion to save money to establish their families. They wish to double and treble all that they possess. This at least is what my father and my mother, and my sisters and their husbands, and my aunts and my cousins, have repeated to me ever since I was born. Thus, for the sake of not being hindered in the great work of self-aggrandisement, they impose upon themselves every possible species of privation. From time to time they

made a great parade before people, and afterwards in the secrets of domestic management they cut so close as to live upon an egg, as people say. They fear so much to spoil their furniture that they never use it, and to spoil their dresses that they seldom wear them, and always dread to spend too much on their indulgences. At least this is my mother's system, and it seems hard to me to lead such a life deprived of every pleasure, when she might allow herself so many. Then if we look still farther, and see that, for the sake of promoting this great end of family aggrandisement, it is necessary to carry this system of economy into the affairs of others, to abridge the means, limit the appetite, and be hard upon those who spend their days in working for us, that really becomes absolutely melancholy. As for me, if I am at liberty to govern myself, as I understand the matter, I will never deny anything either to myself or anybody else. I will live up to my income, and perhaps not be any worse off for doing so in the end, because if people loved me they would work for me with greater zeal and fidelity. Did not Grand-Louis say so at dinner to-day? and he was right."

"My dear Rose, he was reasoning on theory."

"On theory?"

"That is to say, he was applying these generous ideas to a state of society which does not yet exist, but which certainly will do so some day. As to its actual practice, that is to say, if we would realize these ideas at the present time, we should deceive ourselves if we thought that those who would act up to their principles of justice and goodness in the midst of an evil world would be appreciated, loved, and recompensed in this life."

"You astonish me by saying so. I believed that we were of the same opinion. Do you think, then, that it can be right to crush those who labour for our advantage?'

"We are not quite of the same opinion, Rose, and yet I am far from thinking as you imagine I could wish that no person should be made to work for himself, but that, working each for all, they should work for God and for themselves at the same time."

"And how would that be brought to pass?"

"It would take too long to explain, my dear child, and I am afraid I should not do it justice. In waiting for that future which I conceive will eventually be realised, I look upon it as a great misfortune to be rich; and I am much consoled at being no longer so."

"That is strange!" said Rose. "Those who are rich have it in their power to do a great deal of good to those who are poor, and that is the greatest happiness of life."

"A single individual of the very best intentions could do very little real good, even if he gave away all that he possessed; and when he had done so he would be powerless to do more."

"But if everybody did the same?"

"Yes, if each *would*, that is what is so necessary and desirable. Yet it is impossible to bring all the wealthy to make an equal sacrifice. You yourself, Rose, would not feel disposed to do so entirely. You would wish to console as much suffering as your income would possibly allow—that is to say, you would save a few families from misery—but this would be always on the condition that you should preserve what you possess; and I who preach to you, I cling to the last ruins of my fortune to save that which is called the honour of my son, in endeavouring to preserve sufficient to satisfy the debts of his father without plunging him into absolute poverty; for if he were in a state of utter destitution, he must then lose all hope of education, and be placed under the necessity of actual labour, and the result would probably be the death of a delicate being, the issue of a debilitated race, inheriting an enfeebled constitution in every respect inferior to that of the peasant You see, then, that with even good intentions neither we nor others can find a remedy to introduce into society against this alternative; we can do nothing more than just prefer mediocrity to riches and work to idleness. This is only a step towards virtue, and but a poor merit in us, and how little remedy will it bring to the numberless miseries which strike our eyes and grieve our hearts on every hand."

"But the remedy?" said Rose, almost stupified; "is there then no remedy? The king ought to find out a remedy, since a king can do everything."

"A king can do nothing, or nearly nothing," said Marcelle, smiling at the simplicity of Rose. "It is necessary that a people should find out a remedy in their own heart."

"All this has the effect of a dream upon me," said the good Rose. "It is the first time that I have heard such things spoken of. I often reflect when I am alone; but they say with us that the world does not go on well. They say that we must take care of ourselves, because our happiness is the only thing which nobody else will care about, and that everybody is the great enemy of his neighbour; that excites fear, does it not?"

"Yet there is in that a strange contradiction. The world goes on very ill because it is filled with people who fear and hate each other."

"But what is your idea of getting out of this state of things? for certainly no one can perceive the evil without thinking of amendment."

"We may have such an idea clearly defined when all the world has conceived it with us and helps us to work it out. But when there are only some few against the whole, and when they laugh at us as dreamers, and make a crime of speaking, we can only have disturbed and uncertain views. So things at present stand, and I say nothing to the great minds of our own times; I know nothing, I am but an ignorant woman, but to good-intentioned hearts I say, 'Behold our condition in the present day.'"

"Yes, *au jour d'aujourd'hui!* as my father says," said Rose, with a smile. But she added with a sorrowful air:—

"What then shall I do myself? Since I am rich, what good can I do?"

"Preserve in your heart as a treasure, my dear Rose, your sorrow at the sight of suffering, that love of your fellow-creatures which the Gospel teaches you, and an ardent desire to devote yourself to the salvation of others on that day when individual sacrifice will become useful to the whole."

"Will that day really come?"

"Do not doubt it."

"You feel assured?"

"As I do of the justice and goodness of God."

"It is true that God cannot leave hardship and evil to last for ever. It is equally so, madam, that you have filled my brain with dazzling things, which have given me headache; but still it seems to me that I can understand now why you can lose your fortune with so much tranquillity; and I can even comprehend that I could myself descend to mediocrity with pleasure"

"And if it should happen that you were reduced to poverty, suffering, and labour?"

"Ah! if that answered no good purpose it would be dreadful!"

"But if you could perceive that it was promoting some great end? If it were necessary by a sort of martyrdom to pass through a crisis of great distress to attain the salvation of humanity?"

"Ah, well!" said Rose, gazing upon Marcelle with astonishment, "it must then be supported with patience."

"Rather say that it should be rushed into with enthusiasm!" exclaimed Marcelle, with an accent and a look that made Rose tremble, and which passed through her like an electric shock, to her own great surprise.

And now the moon mounted the horizon, and little Edward's gambols began to relax. Marcelle judged it time that her child should be sent to his pillow, and Rose followed her in silence, still meditating on the conversation they had held together. As they approached the farm, however, she began to fall back upon the realities of life; and on hearing in the distance the loud tones of her mother's voice, she looked at the young lady walking on before her, and asked herself keenly this question:

"Is not she deranged also?"

CHAPTER XIII.

ROSE.

Notwithstanding this apprehension, Rose felt an invincible attraction towards Marcelle. She assisted her in putting her child to bed, invented a thousand little plans for their comfort, and on departing took her hand to kiss it. Marcelle, who already loved her as a richly-endowed child of nature, prevented her from doing so, and herself saluted her on either cheek, and Rose, delighted and encouraged, hesitated to go.

"I wish to ask you one thing," she at last said, "and it is this:—Has Grand-Louis really sufficient mind to comprehend you?"

"Certainly, Rose; but why do you inquire?" asked Marcelle, with a little air of malice.

"It is because I thought it very singular, that to-day, among us all, it was our Miller who had the most understanding, and yet poor Louis has not had very great instruction."

"But he has so much heart and mind," said Marcelle.

"Oh, yes, so much heart! I know him well. I was brought up with him. It was his eldest sister who nursed me, and I passed the first years of my life at the Mill of Angibault. Did you not know that?"

"He has not spoken of you to me, but I think I can see that he is very much devoted to you."

"He was always very good to me," said Rose, blushing; "one proof of his kindness is that he has always loved children. He was only seven or eight years old when I was at nurse with his sister, and my grandmother says that he was as anxious to amuse me as if he had been old enough to be my father. It appears, also, that I formed such a friendship for him that I would not leave him, and that my mother, who did not hate him then as she does now, made him come to the house when I was weaned, to keep me company. He stayed two or three years instead of two or three months as was intended at first, and he was so active and obliging that they found him very useful to us. His mother was labouring under some embarrassments then, and my grandmother, who is really her friend, thought it would be relieving her from the care of one of her children. I very well remember the time when Louis, my poor sister, and myself, were always running about and playing in the fields, in the warren, and in the granaries of the château. But when he was of an age to be useful to his mother and work in the mill, she recalled him home. We were

so grieved at being separated, and I felt the time so tedious without him; and his mother, and his sister, who had been my nurse, were so attached to me, that they used to take me to Angibault every Saturday night, and bring me back every Monday morning This continued until I was of an age to be taken to a school in the town, and when I left it, there could be no more companionship between a youth like the Miller and a young girl who was henceforth to be treated like a young lady. However, we still meet very frequently, and more particularly since my father, notwithstanding the distance at which we live, has taken him for his miller, and we consequently see him three or four times every week. For my own part, I have always a great pleasure in going to Angibault, his mother is so good, and I love her so much! Ah! well, madam, would you believe that my mother has got it into her head that there is some harm in all this, and will not suffer me to continue my accustomed walks to the mill? She has taken a dislike to Grand-Louis, and does everything she can to mortify him; and she has forbidden me to dance with him at the assemblies, under the pretext that he is beneath me. However, all the other young ladies of the country, as they call us, always dance with the peasants when they ask us, and besides, the Miller of Angibault cannot be called a peasant. He has twenty thousand francs of fortune, and has been better brought up than most of the others. To tell you the truth, my cousin Honoré Bricolin neither writes nor spells so well as he does, while Grand-Louis' education has not cost half so much money, and I don't at all see why I ought to be so proud of my family."

"Neither do I see it any more than you," said Marcelle, who perceived very clearly that a little finesse was necessary with Mademoiselle Rose, and that she did not express herself with the same ardour and freedom as Grand-Louis; "then you do not see anything in the manner of the Miller to give occasion for your mother's discontent?"

"Oh, nothing at all! He is a hundred times more obliging and agreeable than all our country people, who almost all drink, and who are sometimes very coarse and rough; never has he whispered a word in my ears that need make me cast down my eyes."

"But how could your mother conceive such a singular idea as that he could be in love with you?"

Rose was embarrassed, hesitated, and ended by confessing that her mother might very easily be persuaded of that.

"And if your mother has really guessed truly, is she not right in putting you on your guard against him?"

"But that is according to circumstances. If it were so, and if he had spoken; but he has never said a word to me more than of pure friendship."

"But if he were much interested in you without daring to tell you?"

"Where would be the harm?" said Rose, with a little coquetry.

"You would be very culpable to encourage his passion without seriously intending to return it," replied Marcelle, in a tone sufficiently severe. "That would be making an amusement of the sufferings of a friend; and it is not your family, Rose, who ought to treat lightly the being *crossed in love.*"

"Oh!" said Rose, with rather a pouting air, "men never go mad for such things! However," added she, with simplicity, and hanging down her head, "I must own that poor Louis is sometimes very sorrowful and speaks like a man in despair, without my being able to guess for what. That gives me great pain."

"Not enough, however, to make you condescend to understand."

"But if he loves me, can I do anything to console him?"

"Without doubt, you ought either to return his love or to avoid him."

"I can do neither the one nor the other. To love him is almost impossible, and as to shunning him, I have too much friendship for him to be able to inflict so much pain. If you knew what an expression there is in his eyes when I affect not to be taking any notice of him! He turns so pale that he makes me quite unhappy."

"Then why do you say that it is quite impossible to love him?"

"Ought we to love one that we cannot marry?"

"But we can always marry any one that we love."

"Ah, not always! Think of my poor sister. Her example has made me fear what I should risk in following it."

"You would risk nothing, my dear Rose," said Marcelle, with a little bitterness. "When we can dispose of our love and our free-will with so much ease, we neither love at all nor run into any danger."

"Do not say that!" replied Rose, with vivacity; "I am as capable as another of loving and running the risk of being unhappy—but do you advise me to exercise this courage?"

"Oh, no! far from it. I would only help you to prove the state of your own heart, in order that you may not be the cause of unhappiness to Louis through your imprudence."

"That poor Grand-Louis! But what can I do, madam? Suppose that my father, after great anger and many menaces, consented to give me to him, and that my mother, terrified by the example of my sister, should prefer to sacrifice her repugnance to the grief of seeing me sink under some grievous malady, all of which is scarcely probable—to arrive at such an end, think of the disputes, the scenes, the wretchedness."

"You have fear, but not love, I say. Perhaps you are right, and therefore it will be necessary to keep Grand-Louis at a distance."

This advice, to which Marcelle always returned, did not appear at all to the taste of Rose. The passion of the Miller was extremely flattering to her self-love, more especially since Madame de Blanchemont had so much elevated him in her eyes, and perhaps, also, on account of the rarity of so intense a devotion. Peasants are but little susceptible of passion; and in the circle of the *bourgeois* world in which Rose lived, the feeling in its intensity was becoming more and more strange and unknown, fast becoming merged as it was in the occupations of self-interest. Rose had read some romances, and was proud of inspiring an excessive, disproportioned, and hopeless love, of which some day or another all the country would speak with astonishment. In short, Grand-Louis was the favourite of all the village girls, and there was not a sufficient difference between their rank and those of the *bourgeoisie* of so recent a date as the Bricolins, for her not to feel some intoxication at carrying him off from the most beautiful girls in the neighbourhood.

"Do not think that I am cowardly," said Rose, after a moment's reflection. "I know very well how to answer my mother when she accuses that poor fellow unjustly; and if I were once to take anything into my head, and were assisted by you who have so much spirit, and who my father so much desires to render favourable to his views at this moment, I could triumph over everything. Besides, I declare to you that I should never lose my senses like my poor sister. I am obstinate, and they have always spoiled me too much not to fear me a little. But I must tell you what would annoy me the most."

"Go on then, Rose; I am listening."

"What would be thought of me in the country round if I brought such a disaster on my family? All my friends, jealous perhaps of the love I had inspired, and which they could never find in their own mercenary marriages, would throw a stone at me. All my cousins and suitors, furious at the preference I had given to a peasant over them, and who all think themselves of great value, all the mothers of families, alarmed at the example I should be setting their children, in short, the peasants themselves, envious at seeing among them what they would call a disproportioned marriage, would follow me with their taunts and sarcasms. 'Think of that idiot!' one will say; 'it is in the blood, and she will soon be eating raw food like her sister.' 'Look at that simpleton!' another will say, 'who takes a peasant when she might have had a man of her own class.' 'Look at that disobedient girl!' they will all exclaim, 'who has caused such grief to parents who were never able to refuse her anything. Oh! the effrontery and the shamelessness which has caused all this scandal for a lover, because he is six feet high. She might as well have done the same for a ploughboy, and why not for uncle Cadoche, who goes begging from

door to door. And indeed this is not all; and I really think that it would not be becoming for a young girl to expose herself to all this for the love of any man."

"My dear Rose," said Marcelle, "your last objections do not appear to me nearly so serious as your first, though I see that you would feel much more repugnance to brave public opinion than the opposition of your parents. It is necessary that you should maturely examine, with equal strictness, both sides of the question; and as you have recounted your history to me, I on my part will tell you mine. I will relate to you, but it must be in confidence, the great secret of my life: some time hence everything will be disclosed; but for the present I am sure you will faithfully guard my confidence."

"Oh, madam," exclaimed Rose, throwing herself upon the bosom of Marcelle, "you are too good! I have never had a secret confided to me before, and I have always had a desire to know one, in order that I might keep it. Judge whether this of yours shall not be sacred. It will teach me things of which I am ignorant, for it seems to me that there ought to be a moral in love, the same as in all other things; and no one would ever speak to me upon the subject, under the pretence that there was not, and ought not to be, such a thing as love in the world. It seems to me, however, very—— But speak —speak, dear Madame Marcelle! I assure myself that in possessing your confidence I possess your friendship also."

"Why not, if I may hope to be repaid with yours in the same way?" said Marcelle, returning her caresses.

"Ah!" said Rose, whose eyes were filled with tears, "do you not see that I love you! At the first glance my heart turned towards you, and now it is yours entirely, though I have known you but a day! How is this? I cannot tell. But I have never seen any human being for whom I have felt this preference before. I have only known such beings in books; and you have the same effect upon me, and you alone, as the beautiful heroines that I have read of in romances."

"And since, my dear child, your noble heart has need of love, I shall endeavour not to be unworthy of that affection which this occasion favours me by bestowing."

The little Fanchon was already installed in a neighbouring closet, and gave convincing evidence that she was asleep by overpowering the voices of the owls, and the sound of the whirling gusts of wind which shook the roof of the old towers. Marcelle seated herself near the open window, where she could look up to the quiet stars beaming in the pure and magnificent heavens, and taking the hand of Rose in her own, she spoke as follows.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARCELLE.

"My history, dear Rose, really resembles a romance; but it is a romance so simple, and possessing so little novelty, that it is like all the romances in the world. I will tell it to you in as few words as possible.

"My son, when he was two years old, was in so bad a state of health that I despaired of saving his life. My anxiety and dejection, and my continual care, which I could not suffer to devolve on any other person, furnished me with a very natural occasion of retiring from the world, in which I had made but a short appearance, and for which I had but little taste. The doctors recommended that my son should live in the country. My husband had an estate about twenty leagues from this, as you know, but the riotous and licentious life which he led there prevented me from choosing that as the place of my retirement, even during the time which he spent at Paris. The disorder of the house, the insolence of the servants, who were suffered to pillage at their pleasure, because he deprived himself of the power of paying them their wages regularly, and the disagreeableness of the neighbourhood, were objections all so well painted to me by my old Lapierre, who had passed some time there, that I entirely renounced the thought of making it even a temporary residence. M. de Blanchemont, anxious that I should not come to live here, lest I should discover the embarrassed state of his affairs, made me believe that this place was horrible—that the old château was uninhabitable—and in this last respect he exaggerated very little, as you will allow. He talked of buying a country-house in the vicinity of Paris, but where was the money to be found for such a purpose, when, though unknown to me, he was already on the verge of ruin.

"Finding that his promises led to nothing, and that my son was becoming more and more debilitated, I hastened to engage at Montmorency, a village near Paris, and in an admirable situation, lying among hills and woods, particularly open and healthy, the half of a house, the first that I could find. These residences are very much sought after by the Parisians; even the wealthier classes establishing themselves in them, during the fine weather, for the sake of health and country enjoyment. My relations and my friends came to see me very often at first, but gradually their visits became less and less frequent, as is always the case when those who dwell in seclusion and love the retreat to which they have retired, do not endeavour to attract their friends either by luxury or gaiety. Towards the

end of the first season, I often passed a fortnight together without seeing any one from Paris. Neither was I connected with any of the leading people of the neighbourhood. Edward's health improved, and I was calm and satisfied. I read a good deal, and I walked in the woods, with him only, a peasant to lead his ass, a book, and a great dog, the very jealous guardian of our persons. This life pleased me extremely. M. de Blanchemont was delighted to be relieved from the trouble of being with me. He never came to see me, but occasionally sent a servant to hear of his son's health, and to inquire respecting my need of money, which, happily for me, I kept within very modest bounds, or he would not have been able to supply me."

"What!" exclaimed Rose, "while he told us here that it was for you that he exhausted his own income as well as yours; that it was you who would have horses and carriages, while perhaps you went on foot through that wood to save the expense of paying for an ass!"

"You guess aright, dear Rose. When I ventured sometimes to ask my husband for money, he used to tell me strange long histories about the poverty of the farmers, the severity of the winter, the hail-storms of the summer, that these men were all nearly ruined; and, in the end, for the purpose of being spared these painful details, and being in general deceived by his generous commiseration of their sufferings, I approved his liberal forbearance, and consented to deny myself the enjoyment of my own income.

"The old house in which I had taken up my abode was respectable, but without pretensions, and I attracted no attention in such a retirement. It contained two floors, of which I occupied the first. The ground-floor was inhabited by two young people, one of whom was ill. A little shady garden, surrounded by high walls, where Edward played under my eyes with his nurse, while I sat at my window, was common to myself and the two lodgers, M. Henry Lémor and his brother.

"Henry was twenty-two years of age; his brother was but fifteen. The poor boy was consumptive, and his elder brother attended him with a touching solicitude. They were orphans, and Henry acted the part of a true mother towards the sufferer. He never left him for an hour; read to him; if he walked, supported him in his arms, assisted him to bed at night, and redressed him like an infant in the morning; and as the unfortunate Ernest scarcely slept at all, Henry, pale, emaciated, and careworn with his night-watchings and anxiety, appeared to be almost as great a sufferer as his brother.

"An excellent old woman, to whom the house belonged, and who lived on a portion of the ground-floor, paid very great attention, and manifested true kindness of heart to those young people, but she could not do all that was necessary, and I felt it my duty to second her endeavours. I exerted myself zealously and unremittingly, as you would have done in my place, Rose, and in the last days of Ernest's existence I myself

never quitted his bedside. He manifested towards me an affection and a gratitude that were very touching. Scarcely comprehending his danger, and not aware of the result of his own sufferings, death approached almost unperceived, and he breathed his last even in the act of speaking. He was telling me that I had cured him, when his respiration stopped and his hand grew cold in mine.

"The sorrow of Henry was profound: he fell ill, and in his turn required nursing and night-watching. The strength of Madame Joly, the old proprietress of the house, was exhausted. Happily Edward's health had improved, and I was able to divide my cares between him and Henry. The duty of assisting and consoling the unfortunate Henry fell upon me alone, and towards the end of the autumn I had the satisfaction of seeing him restored to life.

"You may easily conceive, Rose, that a profound and unalterable friendship was cemented between us two in the midst of all these griefs and dangers. When winter came, and the commands of my relations obliged me to return to Paris, we had fallen into such an agreeable way of passing the time, of reading, conversing, and walking together in our little garden, that our separation was truly heart-breaking. We consoled ourselves, however, with the hope of returning to Montmorency the following year. There was yet a diffident timidity between us; and we should have trembled to give the name of love to the feeling which then engrossed us.

"Henry had never dreamed of inquiring into my condition of life, neither had I ever thought of searching into his. We were living at about the same rate of expense in the old house. He had asked my permission to visit me at Paris; but when I gave him my address at my mother-in-law's, at the Hôtel de Blanchemont, he appeared terrified and surprised. When I left Montmorency in the carriage, with its armorial bearings, which my relations had sent for me, he wore an air of consternation; and when it appeared to him that I was rich (I believed then that I was so, and I passed for such), he looked as if he were for ever separated from me. The winter passed without our meeting again, and without my having heard the least tidings of him.

"Lémor was, however, in reality much richer than myself at that time. His father, who had died the year before, was a man of the people, and a mechanic; but a little business, and a good deal of ability, had placed him in easy circumstances. His children had received a very good education, and the death of Ernest left Henry an income of eight or ten thousand francs; but the desire of gain, the unscrupulousness, the terrible harshness and profound selfishness of his commercial father, had made the generous and enthusiastic soul of Henry revolt against them even in his early days. In the winter which followed the death of Ernest, he hastened to give up, almost without recompense, his stock in business to a man that his father had ruined by the

most rapacious manœuvres, and the most traitorous and unmerciful competition. Henry distributed among all the workmen, whom his father had so long oppressed, the produce of this sale, and withdrawing himself with a feeling of aversion from their gratitude (for he often said to me, that these unhappy men had been corrupted and degraded by the example and disputes of their master), he changed the place of his residence to another quarter of the town, and entered on an apprenticeship to become an artificer himself. The preceding year, and before the illness of his brother obliged him to live in the country, he had already begun to study mechanics.

"I learned all these details from the old woman at Montmorency, where I paid two or three visits towards the end of the winter; as much, I confess, to hear news of Henry as on account of a friendship for herself of which she was most truly worthy. This woman entertained a perfect veneration for Lémor. She had nursed poor Ernest with the same tenderness as if he had been her own son; and she never spoke of Henry but with clasped hands and eyes full of tears. When I inquired why he did not come to see me, she replied that my wealth and my position in the world would not permit an open and ingenuous connexion to be established between a person like me and a man who had thrown himself voluntarily into poverty. It was on one of these occasions that she recounted to me all that she knew of him, and all that I have repeated to you.

"You may imagine, my dear Rose, how much I was struck with the conduct of this young man, who had appeared to me so simple, so modest, and so perfectly ignorant of his own moral greatness. I could think of nothing else; in the world it was the same as in my solitary chamber; in the theatre as in the church, his remembrance and his image were always in my heart and in my thoughts. I compared him with all the men that I saw, and the contrast made him appear to me truly great.

At the end of March I returned to Montmorency, but without any hope of finding my interesting neighbour there. I experienced a few moments of real unhappiness, when, descending into the garden with a relation who had accompanied me, I heard that the ground-floor was let to an old lady. But to assist me reluctantly to reinstate myself in the country, my companion having taken a few steps in advance before me, the good Madame Joly whispered in my ear that she had practised this little deception on account of my relation, who appeared to be curious and a babbler, but that Lémor was there, and that he had shut himself up that he might see me when I was alone.

"I thought I should have fainted with joy, and I supported the good-nature and attentions of my poor cousin with a patience which all but killed me. At last she went, and I saw Lémor, not that day only, but every day, and almost every hour in every day, from the end of the winter to the extreme

end of the following autumn. The short and unfrequent visits which I received from Paris, and my own indispensable but as brief returns, robbed us at most, when the hours were added together, of a fortnight of this delightful intimacy.

"I leave you to imagine whether this life was happy, and whether the love that sprang from it must not have gained the mastery over our friendship. But this last sentiment was pure in the eyes of heaven and my son, formed as it had been by the deathbed of Henry's brother.

"There was, perhaps, a little gossip among the natives of Montmorency; but the good character of our hostess, her prudent forbearance respecting our sentiments, which she guessed so well, her earnestness in defending our conduct, the retired life which we led, and the care which we took never to show ourselves out of the house together; in short, the absence of all offence, prevented the malevolence of scandal, and no imputations of such a nature ever reached the ears of my husband or my relations.

"Never was love more religiously felt, nor had a more salutary influence upon the souls of two human beings than upon those it was now engrossing. The ideas of Henry, most singular in the eyes of the world, but the only true, the only Christian ones in mine, transported my mind into a new world. I experienced the enthusiasm of faith and virtue simultaneously with that of affection: these two sentiments were united together in my heart, from which neither the one nor the other could ever more be separated. Henry adored my son—my son, forgotten by his own father, neglected, and almost unknown. Thus Edward entertained for Lémor all the tenderness, the confidence, and the respect which a father ought to inspire in a son.

"The winter tore us away from our terrestrial paradise; but this time it did not separate us. Lémor came to see me in secret from time to time, and we wrote to each other almost every day. He had a key of the garden of our house; and, when we were unable to meet there in the night, a chink in the pedestal of an old statue received our correspondence.

"It is very recently, as you know, that M. de Blanchemont lost his life in a most tragical and unexpected manner, in a deadly duel with one of his friends for a treacherous mistress who had betrayed him. A month after that time I saw Henry, and it is from that moment that I date my troubles. I thought it was so natural that we should be engaged to each other for life! I desired but to see him for a moment, to fix with him the time when the duties of my position would permit me to give him my hand and my person, as he already possessed my heart and my mind. But can you believe it, Rose? his first emotion was a refusal full of alarm and despair! The fear of being rich—yes, the horror of wealth—carried him beyond his passion, and made him fly from me with terror.

"I was offended—in consternation. I had no power to con-

vince him, I had no power to retain him; and since that time I have reflected and find that he is right; that he is just to himself and faithful to his own principles. I esteemed him first, and I loved him afterwards; and I have resolved to arrange my life in a manner to wound him no more—to give up the world entirely, to leave Paris, and shut myself up in the depth of the country, in order to break off all my connexion with the power and wealth which Lémor considers as enemies to humanity, sometimes open and ferocious, sometimes involuntary and blind.

"But with this project, which was but secondary in my thoughts, I associated another which should strike the evil at the root, and destroy for ever all the scruples of my lover—of my future husband. I would imitate his example, and disburse my personal fortune by applying it to that which the convents would call good works, and which Lémor calls the work of remuneration, to that which is just towards man and agreeable to God in all religions and in all ages. I was at liberty to make this sacrifice without injuring that which the rich would call the future happiness of my son, since I believed him still destined to a considerable inheritance; and, besides, I considered that, in abstaining from the enjoyment of his income during the long years of his minority, in collecting the rents, placing the money out at interest, and suffering it to accumulate, I should also be working for his advantage. That is to say, that while bringing him up in habits of sobriety and simplicity, in endeavouring to inspire him with a benevolent enthusiasm, I should put it in his power at some future day to consecrate a considerable fortune to the same good works—a fortune augmented by my economy; and by the duty which I should impose upon myself of not enjoying any part of it on my own account, notwithstanding the rights which the law gives me in that respect. I persuade myself that a soul so simple and so tender as that of my child would respond to my own enthusiasm, and that I should have heaped up his terrestrial riches for his future salvation. Smile a little, if you will, dear Rose; but it appears to me that I shall now have greater advantages under my present losses to train up my Edward to look at things in this point of view. Now he has no longer an inheritance to expect from his father; and the remnant of my own fortune which I have left shall henceforth be consecrated to him in the same way. I no longer believe that I have the right of alienating the little property which remains to us both, and I abandon my former designs because I know that it is my higher duty to provide for my son, since he has no longer any certain provision to expect but that which he may derive from me. This poverty, to which I could only have the right to vow myself alone, is a new baptism which God would not, perhaps, allow me to impose upon my child, before he is of an age to accept it or reject it of his own free will. Can we, born in this age, and having given life to beings destined to the en-

joyments and power of society, violently deprive them, and that without consulting them, of that which the world considers as such great advantages and such sacred rights? In this state of general corruption arising from the love of money, if I were to die, leaving my son to the miseries of want before the arrival of that suitable time when he might be taught the love of labour, to what vices, to what degradation do I not expose him, risking the subversion of his good but feeble instincts! We talk of a religion of brotherhood, and of a community in which all men shall become happy by loving each other, and rich without despoiling themselves. They say that this is a problem which the greatest saints of Christianity, and the greatest sages of antiquity, have been upon the point of solving. They still say that this religion is ready to descend into the hearts of men, while everything appears, in reality, to conspire against it. It is reasoned that, from the terrible and fearful shock of egotistical interests coming into collision, must be born the necessity of entire change; the very weariness of evil must beget truth and the love of right. All this, Rose, I firmly believe: but, as I said to you just now, I am ignorant of the day which God has fixed to accomplish his designs. I know nothing of politics, and to me they throw no light upon my ideal; so, taking refuge in the ark, like the bird during the deluge, I wait, I pray, I suffer, and I hope, without attending to the railleries which the world lavishes upon those who will not approve of its injustice and rejoice in the misfortunes of their age.

"But in this ignorance of the morrow, this unchained tempest of all the energies of humanity raging against each other, it is necessary that I should hold my son in my arms, and help him to float upon the tide which may carry us to the shores of a better world than this. Alas! dear Rose, in an age when money is all in all, everything is bought and sold. Arts, sciences, all enlightenment, and consequently all virtue, even religion itself—all are interdicted to those who cannot pay for the advantage of drinking at their divine sources. And in the same way that we pay for the sacrament of the church, we are compelled at the price of gold to acquire the right of being men, of learning to read, of being taught how to think, and to know good from evil. The poor are condemned, perhaps only those gifted with genius excepted, to spring up deprived of wisdom and instruction, and the mendicant, the poor child who learns, instead of any other work, the art of holding out his hand imploringly, and elevating his voice plaintively, is compelled to confine his weak and powerless understanding within the limits of such obscure and false perceptions. It is a fearful thing to think that superstition is the only religion accessible to the peasant—that all his instruction is reduced to a set of forms which he does not comprehend, and of which he neither knows the meaning nor the origin—that in his eyes God is no more than an idol favourable to the harvest and the flocks of those who

vote him a wax candle or an image. In coming here this morning I met with a procession assembled round a fountain to conjure away its dryness. I inquired why they offered up so many prayers in that place especially, and a woman answered, showing me at the same time a little plaster statue, shut up in a niche, and ornamented with garlands like the god of paganism—

"'It is this good Lady who is the best of all for rain.'

"If then my son is poor, he may also be an idolater, unlike the first Christians, who embraced holy poverty with the true religion. I know very well that the poor man has the right to ask me, 'Why should your son rather than mine know God and truth?' Alas! I have nothing to answer him, since I can only save his son by sacrificing my own. And what an inhuman answer for him! Oh! the times of general wreck are frightful! Each clings to that which is the dearest, and abandons all the rest. But still once again, Rose, what can we do—we poor women, who only know how to weep over it all?

"Thus, the duties which are imposed upon us by our families are in contradiction with those imposed upon us by humanity. But we can still do something for our families, while for humanity, unless we are rich, we can do nothing. For in these times, in which the great fortunes devour the little ones so rapidly, mediocrity is but constraint and impotence.

"See then the reasons," said Marcelle, wiping away a tear, "why I have been forced to modify the beautiful dreams which were so strongly impressed upon me when I quitted Paris only two days ago. But I will still do my best, Rose, not to surround myself with little useless indulgences at the expense of others. I will reduce myself to necessaries, buy a house in the country, live as soberly as possible without injuring my health (since I must devote my life to Edward), put in order the little capital which I shall one day give him, after having instructed him in the pious and proper use which God reveals to us; and, in the mean time, appropriate the least possible part of my humble income to my necessities, and to giving a good education to my son, so that I may always have a little to assist the poor who come knocking at my door. This, I believe, is all that I can do, if there should not soon be formed an association truly holy—a species of new church, where some inspired believers shall rally their brethren around them. to form a community living in common under the laws of a religion and of a morality which satisfy the lofty necessities of the soul, and the laws of a perfect equality. Do not ask me in what these laws shall precisely consist. I have received no mission from above respecting their formation, and God has not given me the genius to discover them. The utmost efforts of my understanding can reach no farther than the power of comprehending these things when they shall be revealed; and my good instincts force me to reject the systems which are pressed upon us now-a-days a little too strongly under different names. I do not yet find one

among the number in which moral liberty is respected, or in which atheism and ambition do not in some way gain the ascendancy. Perhaps you have heard of the St. Simonians and the Fourierists. These systems possess neither religion nor love, and are merely abortive speculations in philosophy, most roughly sketched, where the spirit of evil seems to be hid under the appearance of philanthropy. I do not venture to form an absolute judgment upon them, but I am held back from them by a presentiment that each conceals a new snare spread for the simplicity of man.

"But it is late, my good Rose, and your beautiful eyes, though they still shine, are struggling against the fatigue of listening to me. I do not draw any inference from all this, except that we are both loved by two poor men, and that one of us aspires to free herself from her connection with the rich, while the other hesitates and is afraid of their opinion."

"Ah! madam," said Rose, who had listened to Marcelle with profound attention, "you are both great and good! Now I perfectly understand why I love you, as you know how to love. I feel as if your history, and the explanation of your conduct, had enlarged my understanding. What a dull and pitiful life we are leading compared with that of which you dream! Ah! I believe that I shall die the very day that you go away and leave us."

"Had you not been here, dear Rose, I should have been in haste, I confess, to go and build my cottage close to those of the poorest of my fellow-creatures, but you will make me love your farm, and even this old château. Ah! I hear your mother calling you. Embrace me again, and forgive me if I have spoken some harsh words to you. I reproach myself for uttering them, when I discover how tender and affectionate you are."

Rose embraced the young baroness with emotion, and left her. Giving way to a habit of childish disobedience, she walked slowly on, amusing herself with hearing her mother continue to call her, without answering. Afterwards she reproached herself, and began to run, but she did not answer until she was quite near her. That shrieking voice had all the effect of a discord, after the sweet harmony of Marcelle's discourse.

Fatigued with her journey, Madame de Blanchemont softly retired to the bed in which her child was reposing, and drawing the folds of the orange curtains around her, she fell asleep without dreaming of those hobgoblins so indispensable to an old chateau, when an incomprehensible noise broke upon her ear, and she rose in some confusion.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ENCOUNTER.

THE sound which disturbed the sleep of our heroine was that of some object passing and repassing the door of her chamber with singular obstinacy and awkwardness. The touch was too vague and wandering to be that of a human hand, endeavouring to find the handle of the door in the dark; but as the sound did not resemble that made by a rat, Marcelle could not form any other supposition. She thought that some one belonging to the farm might sleep in the old château, and, perhaps coming back intoxicated, might have mistaken his route, and was groping his way to find his bed. She recollected then that she had not taken the key of her chamber from the outside of the door, and she rose to repair this forgetfulness as soon as the person should move away. But the sound continued, and Marcelle did not dare to open the door to effect her purpose, lest, by showing herself, she should be insulted by some clown. This little anxiety began to be very disagreeable, when the uncertain and impatient hand began to scratch at the door in such a manner as to make Marcelle believe she heard the claws of a cat, and, smiling at her own timidity, she determined to open it, and either admit the animal into her apartment or drive it away. But scarcely had she opened the door, with great care and precaution, when it was pushed in with violence, and the miserable idiot appeared before her eyes standing upon the threshold of her chamber.

This visit appeared to Marcelle more disagreeable than the worst of her suppositions, and she hesitated whether she should repulse this restless being by force, notwithstanding what she had heard of the habitual tranquillity of her insanity. But the disgust which the personal condition of this unhappy being inspired, and still more the feeling of compassion, prevented her from dwelling upon this idea. The lunatic did not appear to perceive her presence, and it was possible, in her desire to be alone, she might take her departure as soon as she noticed Marcelle. Madame de Blanchemont decided, therefore, that it would be the best to wait and see what turn the insanity of her unhappy guest would take, and returning to the side of the bed sat down on the edge, drawing the curtains before her, so that if Edward awoke he might not see the miserable woman who had frightened him so much in the warren. La Bricoline (we have already said, that with us all the eldest daughters of the families of the peasants and coun-

try-people bear the hereditary appellation of their families, feminized, instead of a Christian name) traversed the room with precipitation and approached the window, which she opened after many efforts; the feebleness of her attenuated hands, and the length of her nails, which she would never suffer to be cut, rendering her very awkward. When she had succeeded she leaned out of the window, and in a voice purposely suppressed, she called "Paul!" This, without doubt, was the name of her lover for whom she was always waiting, and whose death she could not resolve to believe.

This lamentable call having awakened no echo in the silence of the night, she seated herself upon the stone bench, which, in all the ancient habitations of this class, fill up the deep embrasures of the windows, and remained quiet, rolling her blood-stained handkerchief round and round, and appearing to resign herself to patient expectation. At the end of about ten minutes she rose and called again, always in the same low voice, as if she believed that her lover was hid in the brambles and underwood which overspread the moat, and as if she feared to arouse the attention of the people at the farm.

For more than an hour this unfortunate being continued her melancholy occupation, first calling upon Paul, and then waiting with extraordinary patience and resignation, the full moon shining the while upon her emaciated countenance and distorted figure. Perhaps these vain hopes inspired her with a species of happiness. Perhaps, in her waking dreams, she deluded herself into the belief that he was there, that he heard and answered, and as often as the illusion faded away and the dream was effaced, she restored it by calling afresh upon the name of her dead lover.

Marcelle contemplated her with a deeply wounded heart. She desired to make herself the mistress of all the secrets of her madness, in the hope of finding some means of softening her sufferings: but lunatics of this class never explain themselves, and it is impossible to guess whether they are absorbed in one thought without relaxation or intermission, or whether the action of the mind is suspended in them, operating only at intervals.

When the miserable girl at last left the window she began to walk backwards and forwards in the chamber, with the same slowness and gravity which had struck Marcelle in the walk at the warren. She no longer appeared to be dreaming of her lover, and her countenance, strongly contracted, resembled that of an old alchemist lost in abstruse researches. This regular pacing lasted long enough to fatigue Madame de Blanchemont extremely, who neither dared to return to her couch nor to leave her son to awake the little Fanchon. At length the lunatic took her departure, and, ascending the staircase to the next story, she went to another window and recommenced calling upon Paul at intervals, waiting for his

coming, and walking backwards and forwards in the apartment.

Marcelle thought that it was her duty to go and warn the Bricolins. Without doubt they were ignorant that their child had escaped from the house, and was running the hazard of committing suicide, or the danger of falling unintentionally out of the windows. But the little Fanchon, whom she awoke, though not without trouble, in order that she might take her place by the bed of Edward, while she herself went to the farm-house, dissuaded her from this project.

"Oh no, madam!" said she, "the Bricolins will not disturb themselves about that. They are used to seeing this poor young lady running about in the night just the same as the day. She does no harm, and she has given over thinking of destroying herself a long while ago. They say that she never goes to bed, and it is not astonishing that, according to the moon, she should now be still more restless. Shut your door close, that she may not come and annoy you any more. It was very well that you did not speak, for that would have offended her and she would have become malicious. She will make noises up-stairs like the owls till daylight; but since you know what it is now, that need not hinder you from sleeping."

Little Fanchon spoke very much at her ease, and thanks to her youth of fifteen years, and the indifference of her temperament, she could have slept under the sound of cannon, had she only known what it was. Marcelle found it a little difficult to follow her example, but at last fatigue prevailed, and she fell asleep to the regular and continued steps of the lunatic which she heard in the chamber above, shaking the trembling joists and timbers of the old château.

On the morrow Rose heard with regret, but without surprise, the incidents of the night.

"Alas!" said she, "we had shut her up very carefully last night, knowing that she has the habit of wandering about, more particularly in the old château, when the moon is at the full (that was the reason that my mother was anxious that you should not take up your abode there); but she must have found means of opening the window and of getting out. She is neither strong nor adroit with her hands, yet she has much patience. She has but one idea and she never rests. M. le Baron, who had not the same humanity of heart as you, and who laughed at things the least ludicrous, pretended that she was looking for —— stop; can I recollect the word? the quadrature—yes, that was it—the quadrature of the circle; and when he saw her pass he would say, 'Ah! well, your philosopher has not yet solved her problem.'"

"I am not in a humour to jest on a subject which wounds the heart," replied Marcelle, "and I have had strange dreams to-night. Come, Rose, we are good friends now, and I hope we shall become still more so; and since you have

offered me your chamber, I accept it on the condition that you do not leave me but divide it with me. A sofa for Edward, and a girth bed for me, is all that is necessary."

"Oh, you fill me with joy," cried Rose, throwing her arms round Madame de Blanchemont's neck; "it will not inconvenience me in the least. We have two beds in all our rooms: it is the custom of the country, that we may always be ready to receive some friend or relation, and I shall be so happy to be able to talk to you every night."

The friendship of Madame de Blanchemont and Rose made great progress during that day. Marcelle abandoned herself to this feeling so much the more readily, because it was the only redeeming point that she could promise herself with the Bricolins. The farmer conducted her through a part of his domains, and never ceased talking of pecuniary concerns and business arrangements. He endeavoured to conceal his desire to purchase, but in vain, and Marcelle, for the sake of concluding as quickly as possible affairs so wholly uncongenial to her mind, was ready to make a part of the sacrifices which he required, as soon as she could feel assured of the accuracy of his calculations, using, however, a little address to keep him in uncertainty. Rose had made her understand that the arrangement of these transactions would have a great influence upon her own destiny, and Grand-Louis had also induced her to promise that she would do nothing without consulting him. Madame de Blanchemont felt the utmost confidence in this unexpected friend, and she resolved to wait his return to make choice of a competent adviser. He knew everybody, and he had too much judgment not to put her in good hands.

We have left the good miller all this time travelling to the town of ——, with Lapierre, Suzette, and the *patachon*. They arrived there at ten o'clock at night, and at daybreak Grand-Louis, having sent off the two domestics in the diligence for Paris, turned his own steps towards the house of the person that he had proposed to himself should become the purchaser of Madame de Blanchemont's carriage. But in passing the post-office, he directed his steps towards it, that he might, as he had promised, discharge personally his commission respecting her letter, when the first person who attracted his notice was the young unknown who had come, a fortnight before, wandering in the Black Valley, visiting Blanchemont, and whom chance had brought to the mill of Angibault. This young man scarcely observed his presence: standing in front of the letter-box, he was eagerly reading with an air of emotion a letter which he had come to receive. Grand-Louis held in his hand that of Madame de Blanchemont, and recollecting the name of "Henry" cut in the tree on the banks of the Vauvre, which had so strongly engaged her attention, he cast an inquiring glance upon the address of the letter which the young man was reading, and which was open to observation in the most natural way in the world, as the unknown held the paper before

him in a manner completely to hide its contents, but perfectly to display its exterior. Actuated by a good-natured curiosity, the Miller, with a glance of his eye, saw the name of M. Henry Lémor traced by the same hand as that of the letter which he carried. Without doubt these two letters were both from Marcelle, and the unknown was—the Miller could not help the thought—the lover of the young widow.

Grand-Louis was not mistaken. The first letter which Marcelle had written from Paris, and which a friend of Lémor, charged with its care, had, according to his instructions, forwarded to remain at the post-office of ——, had that moment reached the hands of the young man, and he was far from expecting to receive the happiness of a second so immediately when Grand-Louis facetiously passed this treasure between his eyes and that which he was just beginning to read again for the third time.

Henry started, and, throwing himself with impetuosity upon the letter, would have seized it, when the Miller, drawing it away, said to him—

"No, no! not so fast, my boy. The postmaster may perhaps see us with the corner of his eye, and I have no desire to be called to an account which might not be very trifling. Let us go and chat together a little further off, for I think you will scarcely have patience to wait while this pretty letter returns from Paris, where it will certainly be sent, notwithstanding your reclaiming it and showing your passport, since it is not addressed *poste restante.* Follow me to the bottom of the walk."

Lémor followed him, but a scruple had already arisen in the mind of the Miller.

"Stop," said he, when they had reached a suitably retired place. "You are certainly the individual whose name is on this letter?"

"Assuredly you cannot doubt it; and you know me, apparently, since you have presented it to me."

"That is nothing, you must have a passport?"

"Certainly, since I must have produced it at the post-office before I could receive my letters."

"That is nothing either. You may take me for a disguised *gens-d'arme*, but I must see your passport. I will give you your letter, when you have shown it to me," said the Miller, holding it towards him.

"You are too mistrustful," said Lémor, hastening to give him his papers.

"One moment still," replied the prudent Miller. "I must be able to take my oath, if the post-office people have seen me give you this letter, that it was delivered unsealed."

And he broke the seal very cautiously, without suffering the letter to open, and placing it in the hands of Henry, he received his passport from him in return.

While the young man was reading his letter with avidity, the Miller, who was not sorry to satisfy his curiosity, made him-

self acquainted with all the titles and condition of the unknown. "Henry Lémor, twenty-four years of age, a native of Paris, by trade a working mechanic, going to Toulouse, Montpellier, Nîmes, Avignon, and perhaps to Toulon and Algiers, to look for employment and exercise his industry."

"What!" said the Miller to himself, "a working mechanic! beloved by a baroness! looking for work, and yet perhaps able to marry a woman who has still three hundred thousand francs. It is then only with us that people prefer money to love, and that the women are so proud. There is not so great a difference between the grand-daughter of father Bricolin, the labourer, and the grandson of my grandfather the Miller, as between the baroness and this poor fellow! Ah, Mademoiselle Rose! I wish that Madame Marcelle would teach you the secret of loving."

And then Grand-Louis proceeded to draw a description of the young man to himself, without noticing that of the passport, examining him as he stood absorbed in reading his letter.

"Middle size, full countenance—good-looking enough, but for that black beard, that is frightful. All these Paris workmen have the appearance of carrying their importance on their chins."

And the Miller, with a secret complaisance, compared his own athletic limbs with the more delicate organization of Lémor.

"It appears to me," he said to himself, "that it is not necessary for a man to have anything remarkable about him to turn the head of a woman of education—and of a fine lady too —Mademoiselle Rose might easily perceive that her very humble servant is not worse-looking than another. But for all that these Parisians have a certain grace, a manner, black eyes, a *je ne sais quoi*, which makes us appear great awkward clowns beside them. And after all, there is no doubt that this young man is greater in mind than in body. Ah! if he would only give me a little instruction in his secret of making himself beloved!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DIPLOMACY.

In the midst of these fine reflections, Master Louis perceived that the young man, in his much more interesting pre-occupation of mind, was moving away without remembering his presence.

"Holloa! comrade!" cried Grand-Louis, running after him; "do you wish to leave your passport with me?"

"Ah, my dear friend! I was forgetting you, and I beg your

pardon," replied Lémor. "You have done me the favour of bringing me this letter, and I owe you a thousand thanks. But I recollect you now. I have seen you before, and that not a long time ago. It was at your mill that I received your hospitality—a beautiful place—and you have so good a mother! You are yourself a happy man, for you are both able and willing to be kind to everybody."

"Yes, fine hospitality!" said the Miller, "you may well say that; but, after all, it was your own fault if you would accept nothing but bread and water. I confess it gave me rather a bad opinion of you, with your beard like that of a capuchin friar. However, you have not much more the look of a Jesuit than I have myself; and, if you remember my face, yours returns to my recollection also. But as to being a happy man, I advise you to keep your envy for others; above all don't envy me, for it is a mockery."

"I do not know what you mean. Has some misfortune fallen upon you since I saw you?"

"Pshaw! I have borne this unhappiness a long time, and God only knows how it will end. But I have no more desire to talk than you have to hear, for you, I see very well, have your own troubles. Ah ha! don't you mean to give me a word of answer for the person who has written to you; if it should only be to prove that I have executed my commission?"

"Then you know that person?" said Lémor, with emotion.

"And it never came into your head to ask that question sooner. What could you be thinking of?"

Grand-Louis's air of good temper, mingled with a little jocoseness, began to alarm Lémor. He feared to compromise Marcelle, and though the countenance of the peasant was not calculated to inspire mistrust, yet Henry thought it advisable to effect a kind of indifference.

"I don't very well know the lady who has done me the honour to write to me," said he. "It was chance that lately conducted me into the neighbourhood where she possesses some property, and she thinks that I can give her some information."

"Tell that to other people," interrupted the Miller; "she did not even know that you were coming, still less what you were coming to do; and that I must beg of you to tell me, if you do not wish me to guess."

"I shall answer that another day," said Lémor, with a little impatience and an air of ironical pride. "You are too curious, my friend; and I cannot understand why you should discover any mystery in my conduct."

"There must be some mystery, friend—I tell you there must be some mystery, since you have not even informed *her* why you came to the Black Valley."

The obstinacy of the Miller became more and more embarrassing, and Henry, fearing to fall into some snare, or to com-

mit some imprudence, considered how he might best deliver himself from these strange investigations.

"I neither know of whom nor of what you are talking to me," replied he, shrugging his shoulders: "I renew my thanks, and bid you farewell. If the letter which you have brought requires an answer or an acknowledgment, I will send it by the post. I set off in an hour for Toulouse, and I have not time to stay any longer with you."

"Ah, you are going to Toulouse!" said the Miller, redoubling his steps to keep pace with him. "I should have thought you were going with me to Blanchemont."

"And why to Blanchemont?"

"Because, if you intend to give Madame de Blanchemont advice about her affairs, as you pretend, it would be more obliging to go and explain yourself to her personally than to write a few hasty words. It is well worth while to go a few leagues out of your way to render such a person a service: and, for myself, who am only a miller, I would go to the end of the world for her if it were necessary."

Lémor informed, almost without his own concurrence, of the place which Marcelle had chosen for her temporary retreat, found it impossible to separate so abruptly from a man who knew her, and who appeared so well disposed to indulge him in speaking of her. The sort of proposition and advice which had been addressed to him, of going to Blanchemont, dazzled that young head, stoical by determination, but profoundly agitated by passion. Torn by contradictory desires and resolutions, his countenance wore the expression of all the perplexities which he believed to be concealed in the depths of his soul, and consequently the penetrating miller was not deceived.

"If I believed," said Lémor, at last, "that these explanations were necessary—but in truth I think they are not—*this lady* does not imply anything of the kind."

"Yes," said the Miller, in a tone of raillery, "*this lady* believed you to be at Paris, and would not wish to bring a man from a distance for a few words; but perhaps, if she had known that you were so near, she would have desired you to return with me."

"No, Master Miller, you deceive yourself," said Lémor, alarmed at the penetration of Grand-Louis. "The questions which she does me the honour of asking are not of sufficient importance for that. Decidedly I shall answer by writing."

But, in forming this resolution, Henry felt his heart torn by conflicting emotions; for, notwithstanding his submission to the orders of Marcelle, the idea of meeting once again, before they were separated for an entire year, excited all the ardour of his energetic temperament. But the provoking Miller would, either through malice or levity, place such a measure in a point of view that would compromise the young widow, and Lémor decided upon self-denial.

"You must do as you like," said Grand-Louis, a little piqued

at his reserve; "but, as *she* will, without doubt, ask me some questions respecting you, I shall be obliged to tell her that the idea of coming to her was not at all agreeable to you."

"That would certainly be very painful to her," replied Lémor, with a forced attempt at gaiety.

"Yes, yes! play this game on to the end with me, comrade," replied the miller, "but for all that you do not laugh in your heart."

"Master Miller," replied Lémor, losing all patience, "your insinuations, which I cannot comprehend, are very much out of place. I do not know whether you are really as much devoted to this person as you pretend, but it appears to me that you do not speak of her with as much respect as I do who scarcely know her."

"You are angry—so much the better: it is more frank and open, and provokes me less than your irony. However, I know what I am to think of the matter now."

"This is too much!" exclaimed Lémor, greatly irritated, "and it appears to me a personal provocation. I know not what foolish ideas you attribute to me; but I tell you this jesting tires me, and I will not submit to your impertinence any longer."

"You are making yourself angry now in good earnest," said Grand-Louis, in a calm tone; "but I am ready to answer you. I am very much stronger than you, but, without doubt, you are a member of some club, and understand the use of the stick; and, besides, they say that all you Parisians know how to amuse yourselves with single-stick quite as well as the professors. As for us, we know nothing of the theory—we only understand the practice. Probably you are more skilful than I am, but I may strike a little harder than you, so that makes us equal. We can go behind the old ramparts, if you like, or, equally well, to Father Robichon's *café*. There is a little courtyard where we can explain ourselves without witnesses, for there is no danger that he will call the guard; he is too well-bred for that."

"Well," thought Lémor, "I have determined upon placing myself in the position of a mechanic, and the laws of honour are as rigid with a cudgel as with a sword. I do not understand the ferocious art of killing my fellow-creatures with one sort of weapon more than with another; but if this Gallic Hercules wishes to give himself the pleasure of knocking me down, I will not attempt to disappoint him by reasoning on the subject; besides, I see that this is the only way of relieving myself from these questions, and I see no reason why I should be more patient than a gentleman."

The generous and peaceable miller had never felt that desire to get up a quarrel with Henry which the latter supposed, from not understanding the true interest which he took in Madame de Blanchemont, and, consequently, in himself also; but this last sentiment was mixed with feelings of doubt and mistrust

from which Grand-Louis was desirous of relieving his own mind by an honest explanation. Not having accomplished this object, he became provoked in his turn; and taking the way to Robichon's *café*, each of the two adversaries persuaded himself that he was compelled to respond to the belligerent fancy of the other.

Six o'clock struck from a neighbouring church when they arrived at Robichon's *café*. This was a small house decorated with this ostentatious title, which we now see attached to the humblest cabarets in the least cultivated provinces, "*Café de la Renaissance.*" They entered by a narrow alley planted with young acacias and superb dahlias. The little courtyard, in which they proposed to decide their quarrel, was flanked by a wall of the old gothic church, covered with ivy and climbing roses; and bowers of honeysuckle and clematis, which, while perfuming the morning air with their fragrance, at the same time screened them from observation. This flowery seclusion, with its neatly-gravelled pathways, all as yet deserted, appeared much more suitable to be the rendezvous of love than a spot for tragical scenes.

Having led Lémor into this place, Grand-Louis shut the door behind him, and seated himself at a little wooden table painted green.

"Ah, well!" said he, "are we come here to strike a few blows or to take our coffee together?"

"That is as you please," replied Lémor; "I am ready to fight, if you like, but I shall not take any coffee."

"You are too proud for it—that is very plain," said Grand-Louis, shrugging his shoulders. "When a man receives letters from a baroness——"

"You begin again, then! Either let me go, or let us fight at once!"

"I cannot fight with you," replied the Miller. "You have only to look at me, I believe, to see that I am not a chicken; and now I refuse to take any part in that which you propose. Madame de Blanchemont would never forgive me, and I should be ruined."

"Let that be no hindrance. If you think that Madame de Blanchemont will blame you for being quarrelsome, you are not obliged to let her hear that you have sought a quarrel with me."

"Ah! am I seeking a quarrel with you now? Who was it that talked about fighting first?"

"I think that nobody spoke but yourself; but that is of no consequence: I accept your proposal."

"But who has insulted the other? I only spoke civilly to you, and you have accused me of impertinence."

"Your manner of interpreting my words and my thoughts was uncivil, and I told you to leave me in peace."

"Yes; that is it. You ordered me not to speak to you; and if I could not help it, what then——"

"I shall turn my back upon you, and, if you find that disagreeable, let us fight."

"This fellow is possessed!" cried Grand-Louis, striking his large clenched fist upon the little table and splitting it through the middle. "Stay, Master Parisian! you may see clearly enough that I have a heavy hand. Your pride makes me very much desire to know whether your head is as hard as this oak plank; for there is nothing in the world more insulting than to say to a man, 'I won't listen to you.' Nevertheless, I must not: I should be afraid to make one hair of that iron head of yours fall to the ground. Listen, and let us have done. I wish you well, however; and I esteem still more a person for whom I would break both arms and legs, and who has, I am sure, the fancy of being interested in you. It is necessary that we should explain ourselves; but I shall not ask you any more questions, since it is labour in vain; but I will tell you all that I have in my heart both for and against you, and, when I have done, if we cannot agree, we can still fight; and, if what I suspect of you is true, I should not have much regret at breaking your head. Come, it is necessary that we understand each other before we measure weapons, and know the reason for doing so. Let us take some coffee, for I have fasted since yesterday, and my stomach cries '*misère!*' If you are too great a gentleman to leave me to pay the reckoning, agree that the least beaten of the two shall take it upon himself after we have finished the affair."

"Be it so!" said Henry, who, feeling himself in a state of hostility with the Miller, no longer feared to forget himself with him through good-nature.

Father Robichon brought the coffee himself, showing all sorts of civility to Grand-Louis.

"This, then, is one of your friends?" said he, looking at Lémor, with the curiosity of the busybodies of the little towns: "I do not know him; but that is all the same. He must be an estimable person, since you have brought him to me. I assure you," added he, addressing Lémor, "that, in coming into the country here, you have made a good acquaintance. You could not have fallen upon a better. Grand-Louis is respected by every one and by all the world; for my part, I love him like a son. Ah! he is so wise, so civil and gentle—gentle as a lamb, notwithstanding he is the strongest man in the whole country; but I can truly say that never—no, never, has he made the least riot, that he would not hurt a child, and that I never heard him raise his voice in my house. True it is that he meets with a great many quarrelsome people here, but he always makes peace wherever he goes."

This eulogium, so singularly applied at a moment when Grand-Louis had brought a stranger to Robichon's *café* to determine a quarrel with him, extorted a smile from both of the young men.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FORD OF THE VAUVRE.

THE panegyrics of Father Robichon appeared so sincere, that Lémor, already prepossessed with a feeling of sympathy towards the Miller, began to reflect on the singularity of his conduct in this instance, and to say to himself that this man must have very strong motives for interrogating him as he had done. They took their coffee together with much mutual politeness, and, when Father Robichon had relieved them from his presence, the Miller thus began:—

"*Sir* (it is necessary that I should address you in this manner, since I do not know whether we are friends or enemies), you must know, first of all, that I am in love, by your leave, with a girl who is too rich for me, and who likes me only just well enough not to dislike me; so, as matters stand, I may speak of her without compromising her, more particularly as you don't happen to know her. I am not very fond of talking about my affairs of this kind: I know that it is tiresome to other people—above all, when they have been stung by the same fly; when they are, as is commonly the case in this malady, extremely egotistical and anxious about themselves, and care very little about their neighbours. However, as in trying to remove a mountain, by working with our own hands alone we can do nothing: my opinion is, that, in helping one another a little in the way of friendship, we might at least do something. It was for this reason that I desired your confidence, just as I have that of a lady that you know very well; and it is on the same account that I give you mine, without knowing whether or not it may be well placed.

"Well, then, I love a girl who has a portion of thirty thousand francs more than I am worth, and, as times go, I might as well think of marrying the Empress of China. I don't care a straw for these thirty thousand francs—nay, still more, I should like to send them to the bottom of the sea, because they are the cause of our separation. But impediments only serve to excite the passion, as has always been the case, and I have the luck to be poor, and in love. I have not another thought in my head; and if the lady that you know so well does not come to my assistance, as she has led me to hope, I am a lost man. I shall do——I do not know what I am capable of doing!"

And, while speaking thus, the countenance of the Miller, generally so cheerful, assumed so intense an expression of despondency, that Lémor was struck with the strength and sincerity of his passion.

"Ah, well!" said he, with cordiality, "since you have the protection of a lady so good and so enlightened—they say so of her, at least——"

"I know not what *they say* of her," replied Grand-Louis, impatient under the obstinate reserve of the young man; "I know what I think myself; and I tell you that this woman is an angel from heaven. All the worse for you if you do not know it also!"

"In that case," said Lémor, who felt inwardly overcome by the sincere homage rendered to Marcelle, "what conclusion would you come to, my dear M. Grand-Louis?"

"I wish to tell you that, finding this lady so good, so estimable—with so pure a heart, and favourably disposed towards me—and already putting things in train for restoring hopes which I believed entirely lost, I attached myself to her in a moment and for ever. This friendship came to me, as in romances they say that love comes, in the twinkling of an eye. And now, I will do beforehand for this woman all the good which she intends to do for me. I would see her as happy as she deserves—happy in her affections, because that is all she desires in the world, as she despises wealth; happy in the love of a man who loves her for herself alone, and is not occupying himself with calculating how much remains of the riches she has lost so cheerfully, nor in trying to discover how much is left or how much is gone, in order to decide whether he shall hasten to her presence or go far from her—to forsake her without doubt, and to try whether his handsome person may not make a more lucrative conquest: in short——"

Lémor interrupted the Miller.

"What reason have you, then," said he, turning extremely pale, "to fear that this respectable lady should have placed her affections unworthily? Who is the worthless fellow whom you suspect of making such shameful calculations in his secret soul?"

"I know nothing of it," said the Miller, who was attentively observing the agitation of Lémor, not yet being able to determine whether he ought to attribute it to the indignation of a good conscience or the shame of perceiving that his secret was guessed—"all that I know is that, about a fortnight ago, there came to my mill a young man whose appearance and manners were very respectable, but who seemed to be labouring under some anxiety, and that all at once he began to talk about money, and ask a great many questions—to take notes—in short, to reckon by francs and centimes upon a piece of paper whether there still remained for Madame de Blanchemont a sufficiently handsome remnant of her fortune."

"So, then, you think that young man was ready to declare his passion only in case such a marriage should prove advantageous? Then he was a wretch! But you, who understand all this so well, must yourself be——"

"Pray complete your sentence, Master Parisian, and do not

put the least restraint upon yourself," said the Miller, whose blazing eyes flashed lightning as he spoke; "you know that we came here for the purpose of explanation."

"I say," replied Lémor, no less irritated, "that to put this interpretation on the conduct of a man with whom we are unacquainted, and respecting whom we are entirely ignorant, a person must himself be very much in love with the portion of his own intended."

The Miller's eyes grew dim, and a cloud passed over his brow.

"Ah!" said he, in a sorrowful voice, "I know very well that this may be said; and I dare wager that people will be found to say it, if I am successful in my love. But her father has only to disinherit her, which he will certainly do if she returns my affection, and then it would be seen whether I reckoned on my finger-ends the amount of the fortune she has lost."

"Miller," exclaimed Lémor, in a blunt and manly tone, "I do not myself accuse you—I cannot even suspect you. But how is it that, with so honest a mind, your suppositions have not been more rational, and more worthy of you?"

"The best explanation of the sentiments of that young man will be his after-conduct. If he fly with transport to his dear lady, I say not a word; but if he take himself off, nobody knows where, that makes all the difference."

"Is it to be supposed," replied Lémor, "that he believes his passion to be insanity, and that he fears to expose himself to a refusal."

"Ah, there I have you again!" said the Miller; "you are beginning to your falsehoods once more. I know perfectly well myself that this lady is delighted to have lost her fortune—that she has most courageously endured her own share of the total ruin of her son, and all because she loves a man that it might have been considered a crime in her to marry under different circumstances."

"Her son ruined!" exclaimed Henry, starting—"totally ruined! Is it possible? Are you certain?"

"Very certain, my boy!" replied the Miller, with a caustic air. "The guardian who would have had the power, during a long minority, to divide with a lover or a husband the interest of a large capital, will now only have the debts to pay; and, accordingly, as she told me last night, it is her intention to make her son learn some business by which he may gain his living."

Henry rose from his seat, and walked about the little court in a state of agitation, while the expression of his countenance was indefinable. Grand-Louis, who never lost sight of him, asked himself if he were at the height of happiness or disappointment.

"Can this be," said he to himself, "a man like *her* and like me, hating the wealth which is opposed to love? or is he a designing fellow, who has inspired the passion by the aid of I

know not what witchcraft, and whose ambition looks much higher than the enjoyment of the little income which she now has left?"

Having meditated a few moments, Grand-Louis, who aspired to the honour of either bestowing a great joy upon Marcelle, or else of delivering her from the perfidy of a deceiver by unmasking him, devised a new stratagem.

"Come, my boy," cried he, softening his tone, "you are put out of your way. There is no such great harm in this. All the world is not romantic, and if you have been thinking about money matters, everybody else does the same. You see, then, that I have not done you so much harm in quarrelling with you. I have made you aware that Madame de Blanchemont's jointure is all exhausted. No doubt you reckoned upon the little advantages of the guardianship of the young heir, for you know well enough that the marvellous three hundred thousand francs was a last and pure illusion of the widow."

"What do you say?" cried Lémor, suspending his agitated walk; "is this last resource also swallowed up?"

"Undoubtedly; do not pretend to be ignorant about that. You have inquired into things too well not to know that Monsieur Bricolin's debt is four times as much as was supposed, and that the Lady of Blanchemont will be obliged to plead to be appointed to keep a post-office, or else to be a vender of tobacco, to have the means of sending her son to school."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Lémor, stunned and stupified with this news. "How strange and hasty a revolution in her life! It must be a stroke from heaven!"

"Yes—a thunder-stroke," said the Miller, with a laugh of bitterness.

"Ah! and tell me, is she not quite subdued with all these troubles?"

"Not at all: on the contrary, far from it. She imagines to herself that you will only love her the better. But you?—that is ridiculous, is it not?"

"My dear friend," replied Lémor, without having heard a word that the Miller had said, "what have you told me?—me!—and I would have fought with you! You have done me the greatest service. When I was going, Providence has sent you to me."

Grand-Louis, attributing this effusion of gratitude to the satisfaction which Lémor felt at having been warned in time of the ruin of his mercenary hopes, turned away his head with disgust, and remained a few minutes absorbed in sorrowful reflection.

"Here is a woman so confiding and so disinterested," said he to himself, "abused by a puppy! She must have as little understanding as he has heart. I am afraid she wants prudence; for, in a single day, and that the first in which I had ever seen her in my life, she suffered me to discover all her secrets. Her good heart is so open that she would let the first

comer see into it. Ah! it is necessary that I should scold her—that I should warn her—that I should put her on her guard against herself in every way; and, to begin, I must deliver her from this fellow here. It would not be a bad plan to scratch and disfigure his handsome face, and make it impossible for him to show himself for some time before the ladies. Holloa! you, Master Parisian!" said he, without turning round, and endeavouring to speak in a voice calm and clear, "you have heard what I have said, and now you know how the case stands; and I know also all that I wanted to know. You are nothing but a mean fellow. This is my opinion, and I am ready to prove it to you directly if you will only allow me."

While speaking thus, the Miller had with great coolness turned up his sleeves, being desirous of having recourse only to his fists. He arose from his seat and turned round, surprised at the slowness of his antagonist in answering. But, to his great amazement, he found himself alone in the place. He ran through the alleys of dahlias, explored every corner of Robichon's café, examined every neighbouring street: Lémor had disappeared. No one had seen him leave the place. Grand-Louis, indignant and almost furious, sought him through the whole town, but in vain.

After an hour of useless investigation, the Miller lost his breath, and grew tired and discouraged.

"Well, it makes no difference," said he, sitting down upon a stone, "there shall not go a diligence or a patache out of the town to-day, in which I will not count the passengers, and look at the length of their noses! This gentleman shall not escape without—but, pshaw! I am a fool! does he not travel on foot, and a man who does not consider himself bound to pay a debt of honour, is not likely to leave a place with a flourish of drums and trumpets. And, after all," added he, growing gradually calmer, "my dear Madame Marcelle would doubtless have felt some ill-will towards me, if I had belaboured her admirer. So strong an attachment is not easily overcome, and the poor woman perhaps would not have believed me, if I had said that her lover was a sharper. How shall I convince her! But it is my duty; yet when I think of the misery I shall inflict.——Is it possible that people can deceive themselves so much!"

While reasoning thus with himself, the Miller recollected that he had a carriage to sell, and set off in search of a certain agent who had retired upon his fortune, and who, having examined it, and disputed about the price a long time, was at last decided by the fear that M. Bricolin would step in between himself and this object of luxury, and deprive him of his bargain.

"Buy, M. Ravalard," said Grand-Louis, with that admirable patience which belongs to the people of his province, while, quite understanding that a purchase is already decided upon, they pretend, with a feigned politeness, to be the dupes of the

pretended uncertainty of the buyer; "I have told you two hundred times already, and I will repeat it as many times more if you like, that this carriage is good and handsome, strong and well finished; that it is built by one of the first coach-makers in Paris, and brought to you without the least expense. You know me too well to believe that I would be mixed up with any underhand design, and neither do I ask you to pay me any commission which you would certainly have to give to another person. Come, you see that this is all profit."

The irresolution of the purchaser lasted until the evening. Parting with his crown-pieces wounded him to the heart. When Grand-Louis saw that the sun was setting—

"Come," said he, "I can't stop here all night; I must go. I see very well that you will not have this pretty wheelbarrow, so splendid, and yet such a bargain. I must put Sophia into it, and return in it to Blanchemont myself as proud as Artaban. It will be the first time in my life that I have rolled in my carriage. That amuses me, and it will amuse me still more to see Father and Mother Bricolin, swelling themselves out in it on Sundays to go to *la Châtre!* It is my opinion, however, that you and your wife would become it much better."

At last, as night approached, M. Ravalard counted out the money, and had the beautiful carriage taken to his cart-house. Grand-Louis loaded his cart with Madame de Blanchemont's luggage, put the two thousand francs in his leathern girdle, and set off in one of Sophia's round trots, sitting upon a box, and singing to himself at the top of his voice, in spite of the joltings and the noise of the wheels on the pavement.

He travelled quickly, and without running the risk of losing his way, like Madame de Blanchemont's unlucky driver, and he had passed the pretty village of Mers before the moon had risen. The rising mists, which, in the Black Valley, even during the warm summer nights, float over the numerous brooks formed in whitish masses, which might have been taken for little lakes, spread over the extent of the far-distant prospect. Already the voices of the reapers and the songs of the shepherds had ceased. The glow-worms scattered about in the woods which bordered the road were soon the only living creatures that the Miller encountered on his way.

However, as he crossed one of the marshy heaths formed by the meanderings of the river, in a country which, with such exceptions, is so fertile and so highly cultivated, he imagined that he caught glimpses of a vague and uncertain form running on the track before him, and which, stopping on the edge of the ford, appeared to wait his approach.

Grand-Louis was very little subject to the influence of fear. However, as he had that night to protect a little fortune of which he was much more jealous than as if it had belonged to himself, he hastened to remount his cart, from which he had wandered a little way, having been walking in advance on

foot, as much to relieve the numbness of his limbs, as to lighten the burthen of his faithful Sophia. The leathern girdle which had somewhat encumbered him, he had deposited in a sack of wheat. When he had remounted his car, which epithet he facetiously applied, in the style of the country, to his equipage suspended from wheelbarrow straps, that is to say, on simple wood, he placed himself in a determined attitude, armed himself with his whip, which, having a weighty handle, might be used as an efficient weapon at either end, and standing like a soldier at his post, advanced straight up to the nocturnal traveller, gaily singing a couplet from an old comic opera which Rose had taught him in her childhood—

> Nôtre meunier chargé d'argent
> Revenait au village,
> Quand tout à coup v'là qu'il entend,
> Un grand bruit dans l' feuillage.
> Nôtre meunier est homm' de cœur,
> On dit pourtant qu'il eut grand' peur—
> Or écoutez mes chers amis,
> Si vous voulez m'en croire,
> N'allez pas, n'allez pas dans la Vallée Noire.

I believe that the song says, "*dans la Forêt Noire;*" but Grand-Louis, who cared as little for the measure as he did for the whole race of thieves and hobgoblins, amused himself by adapting the words to his situation; and the simple couplet, which had once been much in vogue, but which now was seldom sung except at the Mill of Angibault, often enlivened the weariness of his solitary rambles.

When he approached near to this man who was waiting him, standing in a determined attitude, he perceived that his position was exceedingly well chosen for an attack. The ford, if not deep, was, at least, encumbered with great stones, which compelled the horses when crossing to walk with slowness and precaution, and still further, in descending from the bank it was necessary carefully to manage the reins, as the declivity was quite steep enough to expose the animal to the danger of a fall.

"We shall see directly what we have got here," said Grand-Louis, with perfect calmness and self-possession.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HENRY.

In fact, as he expected, the traveller did advance to the head of his horse, and already Grand-Louis, who during his song had dexterously strung on the lash of his whip a ball of lead, pierced for the purpose, and had lifted his arm to make him

withdraw his hold, when a voice which he at once recognised addressed him in an amicable tone.

"Master Louis, will you allow me to cross this water with you in your vehicle?"

"Oh, yes, certainly, my dear Parisian!" replied the Miller; "I am delighted to meet with you. I have been looking for you all the morning. Get in, get in; I have got two words to say to you."

"And I have got more than two words to ask you," replied Lémor, jumping into the cart, and seating himself upon the trunk by his side, with all the confidence of a man ignorant of the least cause of dissatisfaction between them.

"Here is a bold fellow," said the Miller to himself, in the first return of his rancorous feelings, yet taking care to restrain himself until they reached the other side. "Do you know, comrade," said he, laying his heavy hand upon the shoulder of Lémor, "that I don't know what prevents me from just giving you a turn round, and upsetting you in the middle of the water."

"That's a droll notion of yours," tranquilly replied Lémor, "and might be realized up to a certain point. I believe, however, my dear friend, that I could very well defend myself, as, for the first time for a very long while, I should this night furiously combat for my life."

"Stop a minute," said the Miller, drawing up on the sands after having crossed the stream, "we can now chat more at our ease. And first of all, do me the favour, my dear sir, to tell me where you are going."

"I know very little about it," replied Lémor, laughing. "I believe that I shall be guided by chance. Shall I not enjoy a pleasant journey?"

"Not so pleasant as you think, my master, and perhaps you will have to return in bad weather, if such is my good pleasure. It was your will to come into my cart; it is mine to turn you out, if I like, and people don't always descend as they mount."

"A truce to jesting," replied Lémor, "and whip your horse. I cannot laugh now, I am too much agitated."

"You are afraid, and you own it at last."

"Yes, I am as much afraid as the miller of your song, and you will comprehend it all when I have told you—if I should tell you—that I have but little understanding left."

"Once for all, where are you going?" asked the Miller, who began to be afraid that he had wrongly judged Lémor, and who, returning to his reason, which had been disturbed by his anger, asked himself if a guilty person would thus have thrown himself into his power.

"Where are you going yourself?" said Lémor. "To Angibault, very near to Blanchemont; and I—I am going near, without knowing whether I shall dare to go quite so far. But you have heard of the loadstone which attracts the iron."

"I don't know whether you are the iron," replied the Miller "but I do know a famous loadstone of my own, which attracts me, too. Come, my boy, you will then ——"

"I will do nothing! I dare do nothing! and yet she is ruined, ruined at a single stroke. Why should I depart?"

"Why, then, would you have run away so far from her—to Africa, to nobody knows where?"

"I believed she was still rich. Three hundred thousand francs were opulence, compared with my position."

"But since she loved you, notwithstanding this?"

"And you thought that I should have accepted the money with the love? My friend I can no longer attempt to mislead you. I see that you are already acquainted with those things, which I should not have confided to you on so short an acquaintance, even though we should have come to blows; but I have been reflecting since I left you so abruptly this morning without well knowing what I did, and feeling my heart so enlarged with joy that I could not conceal it. Yes, I have been reflecting on all that you have told me, and I perceive that you know all, and that I was mad to fear the indiscretion of a friend so devoted to ——"

"Marcelle!" said the Miller, a little vain at being able to pronounce so familiarly this Christian name, which was defined in his thoughts as the exact opposition to the noble title of the Lady of Blanchemont.

The sound of that name made Lémor tremble. It was the first time it had ever struck upon his ears. Never having been among the circle of relations which surrounded Madame de Blanchemont, and never having confided the secret of his love to any human being, he had not heard from the lips of another the sound of that cherished name, which he had read at the bottom of many letters with so much veneration, and which he had never dared to pronounce excepting in moments of despair or delirium. He seized upon the arm of the Miller, divided between the desire of making him repeat its utterance, and the fear of profaning its sacredness by delivering it up even to the echoes of that solitude.

"Ah, well!" said Grand-Louis, touched by his emotion. "you find out at last that you have no right to mistrust me. Now, shall I tell you the truth on my part? I am still a little suspicious of you. In spite of myself, it pursues me. Pray, where have you passed the day? I think you must have shut yourself up in a cellar."

"I think I should have done so, if I could have found one within reach," said Lémor, smiling. "I have so much need of hiding my emotion and intoxication. Know, my friend, that I was going to Africa, with the intention of never again seeing her whom you have named. Yes, notwithstanding the letter which you brought me, and which commanded me to return in a year, I felt that my conscience ordained a terrible sacrifice. I have spent to-day in a state of fear and uncer-

tainty; for if I have no longer to contend against the shame of marrying a rich woman, there still remains the enmity of the two classes—the struggle of the plebeian against the patricians, who would persecute this noble woman for a choice which they would consider unworthy. But perhaps it would be baseness to endeavour to avoid this crisis. It is not her fault if she is of the blood of the oppressors, and besides, the strength of the nobility has passed into other hands. Their ideas have no longer any influence, and perhaps she who deigns to prefer me may not be universally blamed. However, it is fearful—is it not?—to drag a woman that we love into a combat against her family, and draw upon her the blame of all those among whom she has always lived. By what new feelings shall I replace all the old affections which surround her?—secondary, it is true, but numberless, agreeable, and such as a generous heart cannot tear away without regret. For I am isolated upon the earth myself, as the poor always must be, for the people do not yet know how they ought to receive those who overcome so many obstacles to assist their cause. Alas! I have been passing part of this day in a wood, I know not where, in a retired place where chance led me, and it is only after many hours of anguish and laborious meditation that I resolved to seek you, and ask you to procure me an hour's interview with her. I sought you in vain, perhaps because you on your part were looking for me, because it was you who put into my head this ardent desire to go to Blanchemont. But I believe that you are imprudent and I am insane, for she has forbidden me to inquire to what place she may retire, and she has determined upon the delay of a year for the fulfilment of her mourning."

"So long as that?" said Grand-Louis, a little frightened at the recollection of those ingenious ideas which he had that morning entertained, in urging the lover of Marcelle to pay her an immediate visit. "These notions of propriety of which you speak, are they so serious in your opinion? Is it necessary after the death of a worthless husband that a year, neither more nor less, should elapse without an honest woman seeing the face of an honest man who thinks of marrying her? Is this the custom in Paris?"

"Not more in Paris than elsewhere. The religious sentiment which we entertain on the great mystery of death is without doubt the arbiter of the length of time which we devote to the remembrance of those who are gone."

"I know that it is a good feeling which has established the custom of wearing mourning in the dress, in the words, in all the conduct; but it is wrong that this should degenerate into hypocrisy, when the defunct is truly very little to be regretted, and when love speaks honestly of another. Does decency require that she who is left should live a widow, while the aspirant to her hand is forced to expatriate himself? and must he never pass before her door, and never look at her from the

corner of his eye, even when she does not seem to be aware of his presence?"

"You do not know, my friend, the malignity of those who entitle themselves 'People of the World;' singular denomination—is it not? And yet it is a just one in their eyes, since the people are reckoned as nothing, while they arrogate to themselves the empire of the world, which they have always had, and which they will still have for a certain time."

"I have no difficulty in believing it," exclaimed the Miller, "but these people are worse than ourselves. However," added he sorrowfully, "we are none of us so good as we ought to be. We ourselves too are often babblers and buffoons, and condemn the weak. Yes, you are right; we ought to take care not to give anybody a pretence to speak ill of that dear lady. Some time must pass before she can be known, loved, and respected as she deserves; but a single day would be sufficient for them to say that she acted foolishly. My advice then is, that you do not show yourself at Blanchemont."

"You are a good adviser, Grand-Louis, and I was sure you would not lead me into any evil. I shall have the courage to listen to your reasonable counsel, as I had the folly of being inflamed by the first measure of your kindness. I will stay and talk with you till we get near your mill, and then I will return to ——, that I may continue my journey to-morrow."

"Not so fast! not so fast! You fly from one extreme to another," said the Miller, who, while talking with Lémor, continued to make the patient Sophia pursue her way. "Angibault is a league from Blanchemont, and you can very well pass the night there without compromising anybody. You will not find any woman there to-night but my old mother, and she will not chatter. You have had a fine walk from —— to here, and I should have neither heart nor soul if I did not force you to accept a traveller's bed, with a little frugal supper, as M. le Curé says, who is not very fond of them in that fashion either. Besides, ought you not to write? You will find everything that is necessary for that with us—though, perhaps, not very pretty paper for letter-writing. I am clerk, it is true, for the mairie of our *commune*, but I do not write upon vellum; but when you write down your loving prose upon the paper marked with the stamp of the corporation, that will not hinder it from being read, perhaps twice instead of once. Come, I tell you that I see already the smoke of my supper rising above the trees; we will put my mare into a little trot, for I wager that my old mother is hungry, and that she will not eat without me. I promised her I would return home very early."

Henry was dying with desire to accept the good Miller's invitation; but he made a little opposition for form's sake, for lovers dissemble like children. He had renounced the imprudence of going to Blanchemont, but he was hastening in that direction as if drawn by a magical charm; and each step of Sophia which brought him nearer to the circle of attraction

agitated a heart so lately torn with a struggle beyond its strength.

Lémor yielded, however, blessing in his heart the urgency of the Miller's hospitality.

"Mother," said he to Grand'-Marie, as he jumped out of his cart, "have I broken my word to you? By the stars, I should say it was ten o'clock."

"It is but little more," said the good woman; "it is only an hour later than you say. But I don't complain of you; I see that you have executed the commissions of our dear lady. But are you thinking of taking all these things to Blanchemont to-night?"

"Faith, no! it is too late. Madame Marcelle tells me that a day sooner or later is of little consequence; and besides, could we gain admission into the new château after ten o'clock? Have they not repaired the embattled wall of the court, and put iron bars to the great door. By-and-by, they will be having a drawbridge over their dry-moat. M. Bricolin believes himself already the Lord of Blanchemont, and he will very soon have armorial bearings over his chimney. He will call himself De Bricolin. But see, mother, I have brought you company. Do you know this young man?"

"Ah! it is the gentleman who was here last month!" said Grand'-Marie, "the gentleman that we took for one of Madame de Blanchemont's agents; but it appeared that she did not know him."

"No, no! she did not know him at all," said Grand-Louis, "and he is not an agent. He is a government officer come down to make some new regulations in the assessment of the customs. Come, master geometer, sit down, and eat while the supper is hot."

"May I ask you, sir," said the Miller's mother, when they had finished their first course, which was radish soup, "was it you who cut your name upon one of our trees on the edge of the river?"

"It was so," answered Henry, "and I beg your pardon for a foolish schoolboy trick, which perhaps may kill the young willow-tree."

"Begging your pardon, it is a white poplar," said the Miller. "You are a true Parisian, and without doubt don't know the difference between hemp and potatoes. But it is of no consequence. Our trees may well mock at the edge of your penknife, and my mother only asked you the question for sake of conversation."

"Oh, I should not reproach you for the sake of a little tree; we have plenty of them here," said the old woman; "but it was our young lady who tormented herself so much to know who had been engraving that name; and her little son, who saw it first, and read it quite by himself. Yes, sir, a child of four years old, he could do what I never could do in my life!"

"She has been here then?" hastily exclaimed Lémor, who did not possess the command of his reason at that moment.

"What difference can that make to you, since you are a stranger to her?" replied the Miller, giving him a touch under the table to warn him to control himself, more particularly before the boy belonging to the mill.

Lémor thanked him with a look, though his indication had been a little rough; and, fearing to divulge his secrets, he refrained to open his mouth except to eat.

When they were separating for their *night's work*, as the Miller's mother called it, Lémor, who was to share the Miller's little chamber on the ground floor, opposite the entrance of the mill, entreated Grand-Louis to leave him at liberty a little longer, that he might walk a quarter of an hour on the banks of the Vauvre.

"*Pardieu!* and I will show you the way," said Grand-Louis, who felt the romance of his new friend to be very interesting, from the resemblance which it bore to his own. "I know where you wish to go to indulge your dreams, and I am not so sleepy but that I can take a turn with you by the light of the moon, for she has risen, and come to look at herself in the water. Come and see, my Parisian, how fair and proud she looks in the basin of the Vauvre, and tell me if you have at Paris as beautiful a moon and as fine a river. Stop!" said he, when they were at the foot of a particular tree; "it was here that she leaned herself while reading your name. She leaned in this way, and she looked with her eyes—as I could not do if I were to spend two hours in trying. Oh! well; you knew that she was coming here, and so you left her your signature."

"The strangest thing of all, and what I can least understand, is, that it was chance alone; a childish caprice which induced me to mark my passage through this beautiful valley, to which I believed I should never return. I had heard in Paris that *she* was ruined; I hoped it might be so, and I came here to learn the truth; but when I found that she was still too rich for me, I only thought of bidding her farewell for ever."

"You see there is a Providence for lovers, for unless there had been, you would never have returned. There was a something in the manner of Madame Marcelle, when she was questioning me about the young traveller who had written his name, that made me guess in a moment that she loved, and that her lover's name was Henry. It was that which enlightened my mind to guess all the rest, for she told me nothing; I guessed everything: I must accuse myself of that, and even make it my boast."

"What! she confided nothing to you, and I have avowed everything! The will of God be done! I see his hand in all this, and I will no longer hesitate in yielding to the absolute confidence with which you have inspired me."

"I should be glad to be able to say as much to you," replied

Grand-Louis, taking him by the hand, "for I am beginning to feel a friendship for you. And yet, there is something which still perplexes me."

"How can you still suspect me, when I have returned to your Black Valley only to breathe the air which she breathed, when I knew at last that she was reduced to poverty?"

"But might you not have been remaining among the men of business and the lawyers, while I was searching for you in the town this morning? And you may have heard that she is still moderately rich."

"What do you say? Can it be true?" exclaimed Lémor, in a sorrowful accent. "Do not trifle with me, my friend! You suspect me of such ridiculous things, that I do not even attempt to justify myself. But there is one thing that I must say in two words:—If Madame de Blanchemont is still rich, and if she would accept the love of a *proletaire* like me, I must then leave her for ever. Ah! if it is so! if I must hear it——not yet, in the name of heaven! Leave me to dream of happiness till to-morrow—till I quit this country for a year, or for ever!"

"Which you would be rather mad to do, friend," cried the Miller; "and even now, your manners appear to be so exaggerated, that I am afraid all this is an affectation assumed to deceive me."

"You do not, then, participate in my feelings? You have no hatred to riches?"

"No, indeed! I neither hate them nor love them for their own sake, but just according to the good or the harm which they do. For example, I detest Father Bricolin's crown-pieces because they are the hindrance to my marrying his daughter. Ah! there now!—I have let slip a name that I should have done better not to tell you. But, after all, I know your affairs, and you may as well know mine. I say, then, that I detest those crown-pieces; but I should very much love thirty or forty thousand francs if they would fall on me from heaven, because they would enable me then to make pretensions to Rose."

"I do not think as you do. If I possessed a million, I would not wish to keep them."

"You would throw them into the river, rather than suffer them to establish a right of equality between *her* and you? You are still a comical fellow."

"I believe that I should distribute it all among the poor, like the Christian communities of the first ages, to disencumber myself, although I should know very well that I might not be doing a truly good work; for, in giving up their property, the first disciples of equality were founding a society. They brought to the unhappy a legislation which was at the same time a religion. Their money was the food of the soul at the same time that it was the food of the body. This sharing of their property was a doctrine and made adepts. In our time we have nothing like it. The public mind has

formed vague conceptions of the organization of a community, holy, and diffusing blessings like a Providence, the laws of which are not yet discovered. We cannot renew the little world of the first Christians; we feel the necessity of new disclosures for this; we have them not, and besides, men are not now disposed to receive them. The money which may be distributed among a handful of wretched people can only produce selfishness and idleness among them, if an endeavour be not made at the same time to make them understand the relative duties of such an association. I repeat to you, my friend, that on the one side there is not sufficient light among the initiators; on the other, there are not sufficient confidence, sympathy, and ardour, among the initiated. You see, then, the reasons why Marcelle (and now I also dare to breathe her name, since you have uttered that of my Rose) has proposed to me to imitate the example of the Apostles, of giving to the poor that wealth which inspires me with horror; but I have recoiled from a sacrifice which it does not seem to me that we have the skill and genius to render productive, in the present state of society, of any great advancement of the interests of humanity. In possessing riches, to render them useful according to my views, it is requisite that their owner should be more than a man of feeling; he must be a man of genius. I am not one; and in contemplating the profound vices and the frightful selfishness with which wealth invests its possessor, I am penetrated with dread. I thank God for having made me poor—I, too, who might have possessed a rich inheritance; and I take an oath never to have more in my possession than the payment of a week's toil."

"In this way you thank God for having made you wise by a simple effort of his goodness, and you profit by the accident which has kept you out of temptation. This is a very easy sort of virtue, and I am not so much surprised at it as you expect. I understand now, however, why Madame Marcelle was so content with her ruin yesterday. You have put all these fine things into her head. They seem very grand, but they mean nothing. It is just like people saying, 'If I were rich I should be wicked, and I am delighted at not being so.' It is the history of my grandmother, which says, 'I don't like eels, and I am very glad of it, because if I did like them I should eat them.' But why should you not be generous as well as rich—eh? And if you could do nothing better than give bread to the hungry around you, that would certainly be something, and money would be better placed in your hands than in those of the avaricious. Oh! I have entered into your views; I understand them. I am not so stupid as you think; and I have now and then read the journals and pamphlets, which have taught me a little of what is going on beyond our own country, where we may certainly say that we see nothing new. I see that you are a framer of new systems, an economist, a learned man."

"No. It is, perhaps, a misfortune, but I understand the science of figures less than any other, and I know nothing of political economy, as it is understood in the present day. It is a circle of evil."

"You have not studied a science without which you can attempt nothing new! Well, then, you are but a sluggard."

"No; only a dreamer."

"I understand; you are what people call a poet."

"I never made verses in my life, and now I am only a mechanic. Do not take me so seriously. I am a child in everything; a child in love! All my merit is, that I have learned a trade which I am going to practise."

"That's right! Get your living as I do mine, and don't torment yourself any more with the way the world goes on, since you can do nothing to improve it."

"My friend, what reasoning! If you were to see a boat filled with a living family sinking in this river, and you were bound to this tree, and could not reach them to succour them, I put the case, could you see them perish with indifference?"

"No, sir; I should break down the tree were it ten times greater. My zeal would be so earnest, that I believe God would work a little miracle for me."

"And yet the human family is perishing," cried Lémor, sorrowfully, "and God works no more miracles."

"I fully believe it, because nobody any longer trusts in him. But, for my own part, I believe it; and I declare to you, since we are hiding nothing from each other, that at the bottom of my heart I have never despaired of marrying Rose Bricolin; though to bring her father to accept a poor son-in-law would be a much more surprising miracle than for me to break that great tree down with my arms without a hatchet. Ah! well, this miracle will be performed, though I don't know how. In some way or another I shall have fifty thousand francs. I shall find them in the ground when I am planting my cabbages, or in the river when I am throwing my nets; or a thought will come to me—no matter what. I shall discover something, since it is sufficient, they say, for a thought to move the world."

"You will discover the means of establishing equality in a society which exists but by its inequality: is it not so?" said Henry, with a sorrowful smile.

"Why not, sir?" replied the Miller, with a cheerful vivacity; "when I have made my fortune, as I shall not be either wicked or avaricious, and as I am sure I shall never become so, any more than my grandmother would ever learn to like the eels which she could not endure; when I shall have become, all in a moment, more learned than you, and when I have found in my own brain that which you have not found in all your books—the knowledge of the secret of doing justice with my power and bestowing happiness with my wealth.

Does this astonish you? And yet, my Parisian, I declare to you that I know still less than you do about political economy, and have never learned as much as the alphabet of it. But what of that, since I have the will to believe? Read the Evangelists, sir. It is my opinion, that, though you speak so well, you have almost forgotten that the first apostles were of the people who had nothing and knew nothing, like myself. The good God breathed upon them, and they became wiser than all the scholars and priests of their times."

"Oh people! it is for you he prophesies!" exclaimed Lémor, folding him in his arms. "It is for you that God will work miracles; it is upon you that he will breathe his Holy Spirit. You know no discouragement; you are not depressed by doubts. You feel that the heart is more powerful than the doctrine; you feel its energy, its love, and consider them as inspiration. It is for this that I have burnt my books, for this that I would return to the people from whom my relations have separated me; it is for this that I would seek, among the poor and simple-hearted, the faith and the zeal which I have lost in being brought up among the rich."

"I understand," said the Miller: "you are sick, and seek ing health."

"I should find it if I lived near you."

"I shall give you good hopes of it if you promise not to infect me with your malady. And to begin, talk to me reasonably. Say to me, then, whatever may be Madame Marcelle's position, that you are ready to marry her if she will only consent."

"You revive my anguish. First you told me that she was destitute, and now it appears as if you had thought better of it, and that she was rich again."

"To tell you the truth, that was only to try you. The three hundred thousand francs still exist, and let Father Bricolin do as he likes, I shall give her such good advice that she shall keep them. With three hundred thousand francs, comrade, you can do some good, I hope, since with fifty thousand, which I have not, I pretend that I could save the world."

"I envy and admire your gaiety," said Lémor, in deep depression; "but you have brought back death to my soul. I adore this woman, this angel, and yet I cannot be the husband of a rich wife! The world entertains prejudices respecting honour to which I submit in spite of myself, and which I know not how to shake off. I could not consider as my own that fortune which she ought, and which she doubtless will, preserve for her son. My sense of probity would not allow me to make use of her wealth; and I should have great scruples in condemning to indigence a woman for whom I feel an infinite tenderness, and a child whose future independence I ought to hold sacred. I should suffer from their privations, and tremble at every turn, lest I should see them sink under a life of hardship. Alas! this child and this woman belong not even to the

same race with ourselves, Grand-Louis. These are the dethroned masters of the world, who require from their ancient slaves the services and the homage to which they have been accustomed. We should see them languish and perish under our thatched roofs. Their fragile hands would be wounded by labour, and our love might not perhaps be able to sustain them to the end of a struggle under which we ourselves might break down."

"Here again is your malady returning and your faith failing," said Grand-Louis, interrupting him. "You no longer even believe in love; you do not see that *she* would endure everything for you, and that she would even find happiness in it all. Truly, you are not worthy to be so greatly beloved."

"Ah, my friend! if she were to become poor—really and entirely poor—without my having to reproach myself with helping to reduce her to that condition, you should see if I wanted courage to support her."

"Ah, well! you would work to gain a little money, as all of us work. But why then despise so much the money which she has, and which is already gained?"

"It has not been gained by the honest labour of the poor. It is stolen money."

"How can that be?"

"It is the heritage of the feudal rapine of her ancestors. It is the sweat and the blood of the people which has cemented the stones of their mansions, and manured their estates!"

"That is true! But money does not keep that sort of rust upon it. It is gifted with the quality of being purified or sullied, according to the nature of the hand which touches it."

"No!" said Lémor, with warmth. "It is the money which is defiled, and which also defiles the hand which receives it."

"That is a figure of speech," calmly replied the Miller. "It is still the money of the poor, though it may have been extorted from him by pillage and the violence of tyranny; but would you think it necessary that the poor should abstain from receiving their own back again, because the hands of the plunderers have been handling it for a long time? Let us go to rest, my dear fellow, for you are unreasonable; and you shall not go to Blanchemont. I am of opinion that it is less and less desirable for you to pay this visit, since you have nothing but these absurd things to say to my dear lady. But, by my faith, you shall not leave me till you have renounced all your —wait till I find the word—Utopias! Is that it?"

"Perhaps!" said Lémor, dejectedly, and forced by his passion to submit to the ascendancy of his new friend.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PORTRAIT.

We know not whether it is quite conformable to the rules of art minutely to describe the person and the dress of those who are introduced into the scene of a romance. Perhaps the writers of fiction of our own times (and ourselves the first on the list) have a little abused the fashion of drawing portraits in their narrations. However, it is an old custom; and hoping that future masters of the art, condemning our elaborateness, may sketch their personages with bolder and clearer touches, we feel that we have sufficient firmness to depart from the beaten way, and we proceed to repair a forgetfulness into which we had fallen in omitting the portrait of one of our heroines.

And really, does it not seem that in a history of love there must exist a great deficiency of interest when we are not able to realize the person of our heroine in our own imagination, and are ignorant whether she is endowed with a beauty more or less remarkable. It is not sufficient for us to say, "She is beautiful!" If her adventures and the peculiarities of her position make any impression on us, we instantly desire to know whether she is fair or dark, tall or short, pensive or animated, elegant or simple, in her dress and style. If we are told that she is passing down the street, we run to the windows to look at her, and according to the expression of her countenance and person we are disposed to approve or excuse her for having drawn upon herself the public attention.

Such, without doubt, was the opinion of Rose Bricolin, as she lay languishingly upon her pillow, on the following morning after she had shared her chamber with Madame de Blanchemont; for while the young widow, more active and an earlier riser, had already finished her toilet, Rose examined her attentively, and asked herself if the beauty of this Parisian would eclipse that of her own at the village fête, which was to be held the following day.

Marcelle de Blanchemont was rather below the middle size, but she did not appear so, thanks to the elegance of her proportions and the grace of all her attitudes. She was decidedly fair, but not of an insipid fairness, nor even of an ashy fairness, a colour too much extolled, since it generally deadens the expression of the countenance, being in itself an indication of a feeble organization. She possessed a living beauty, warm, animated, resplendent, and her hair was one of the great perfections of her person. In her infancy she had possessed ex-

extraordinary beauty, and in her convent had often been called "The Cherub;" at eighteen, it could only be said that she had a very agreeable person; but at twenty-two, she was such that she had inspired more than one passion without perceiving it. Yet, notwithstanding all this, her beauty did not reach perfection, and her freshness was sometimes impaired by a feverish animation. A dark shade might be traced under her bright blue eyes, which told of the workings of an earnest and ardent soul, and which an unintelligent observer might possibly have attributed to the agitations of an unsubdued spirit; but it was impossible for the pure-minded beholder not to feel that this woman's existence was of the heart more than of the mind, and of the mind more than of the senses. The ever-varying tint of her complexion, her look, so open and so frank, the light white down upon the corner of her lips, were with her certain indications of an energetic will, of a character devoted, disinterested, courageous. She pleased at the first glance without dazzling, and she dazzled afterwards still more and more without ceasing to please; and even those who did not at the first glance consider her beautiful, were very soon unable to detach from her either their eyes or their thoughts.

The second transformation which had passed over her was the work of love. Industrious and cheerful in her convent, she had never been either melancholy or a dreamer before she had known Lémor; and even after she had conceived this affection, she had continued to act with energy and decision, even in all minor things But an intense affection, in concentrating and devoting to one only end and aim all the energies of her character, had marked its traces on her countenance, and imparted a strange and mysterious charm to every gesture. No one knew that she loved, though all the world felt that she was capable of loving passionately; and every man who approached her became possessed with the desire of inspiring her either with love or friendship. On account of this strong attraction there had been a time in which the women of the world, jealous of her influence, and unable to breathe one reproach against her moral character, had accused her of coquetry; but never was censure less deserved. Marcelle had no time to waste in this childish and degrading amusement. She had not even the desire to excite an admiration interesting only to her vanity; and in retiring so abruptly from the world she had no cause to reproach herself with having voluntarily left any mark of her passage through it.

Rose Bricolin, incontestably more beautiful, but whose mind necessarily possessed far less interest in its development, had often heard the young Baroness de Blanchemont spoken of as a beauty of the fashionable Parisian world; and she could not very well comprehend how, with an apparel so simple, and manners so natural, this somewhat faded beauty could have gained such a reputation. Rose did not understand that in society highly cultivated, and consequently wearied and exhausted, animation

of mind, diffusing itself over the person, invests its possessor with a charm which always excels the highest order of cold, classical, majestic beauty. However, Rose felt that she already loved Marcelle to excess, though she had not yet learned in what the attraction consisted; whether it was in her countenance, so frank and animated, in the affectionate tone of her voice, in her kind and benevolent smile, or in the confiding generosity of every action.

"And yet she is not so beautiful as I expected," thought she. "Why is it then that I wish to be like her?"

Rose caught herself, however, endeavouring to dress her hair in the same manner as Madame de Blanchemont, and in an involuntary imitation of her deportment, her quick and graceful manner of turning her head, and even the inflections of her voice. She succeeded sufficiently well to lose in a few days the remainder of a rustic awkwardness which had not been without its charm. But it is only just to say that this vivacity was not so much borrowed as inspired, and its effect was greatly to enhance in her the value of the gifts of nature. Rose possessed both courage and frankness of disposition; and Marcelle was soon destined rather to develope her real nature, repressed for a time by exterior circumstances, than to prompt her to the assumption of a mere factitious imitation

CHAPTER XX.

LOVE AND MONEY.

In passing and repassing from her chamber, Marcelle heard proceeding from some neighbouring apartment a strange voice, which was at the same time powerful as that of a bull and hoarse as that of an old woman. This voice, which appeared to break out of some cavernous breast which could neither retain nor express its conflicting emotions, repeated numberless times:—

"But they have taken all! taken all—even my clothes!"

And a firm voice, which was easily known as that of the grandmother Bricolin, replied—

"Hold your tongue, master! I am not talking about that."

Seeing the astonishment of her companion, Rose took upon herself to explain this dialogue.

"There has always been some misfortune in our house," said she; "and, even before my birth and that of my poor sister, an evil fate was in our family. You have seen my grandpapa, who appears so old, so very old. It is he that you hear. He does not speak often, but when he does, he is so deaf, and he makes such a noise that it sounds through the whole house. He almost always repeats very nearly the same

thing. 'They have taken everything, plundered everything, stolen everything!' He speaks of nothing else, and if my grandmother, who has great power over him, had not silenced him, he would have said the same thing to you last night instead of wishing you good-day."

"But what does it mean?" asked Marcelle.

"Have you never heard that story?" said Rose, "and yet it has made a great noise; but it is true that you have never visited this place, nor even been much interested in what has passed here. I would wager that you do not know, that for more than fifty years the Bricolins have farmed the estate of Blanchemont."

"I know it, and I even know that your grandfather, before he came to settle here, held a farm of considerable extent on the side of Blanc, belonging to my grandfather."

"Ah! well, in that case you have heard the history of the *chauffeurs?*"

"Yes; but it is so long ago that I forget it, for it had become an old tale when I was still but a child."

"It happened more than forty years ago, as nearly as I can tell, for we never willingly speak of the subject here. It still causes too much pain and alarm. My lord, your grandfather, had at the time of the assignats, confided to my grandpapa Bricolin, the sum of fifty thousand francs in gold, begging him to hide them in some old wall of the château while he remained concealed in Paris, where he was so fortunate as to escape being denounced. You know all that better than I do. So then my grandpapa took this gold and hid it with the whole of his own savings somewhere in the old château of Beaufort, of which place he was the farmer, and which is more than twenty leagues from here. I myself have never been there. Your grandfather, not seeming anxious to require the return of his deposit after the lapse of some considerable time, mine had the misfortune to admit a villanous attorney into his confidence, for the sake of having a letter written to him to request that he would receive it back again. The following night the *chauffeurs* forced an entrance into the house, and subjected my poor grandfather to a thousand tortures, until they had extorted from him where he had hid the money. They carried it all off, both his own and yours, and even the linen of the house, and all the little wedding trinkets of my grandmother. My father, who was but a child, they bound with cords and threw upon the bed; he saw everything that passed, and almost died with fear. My grandmother was shut up in the cellar. The farming-men were also beaten and bound, and pistols were held at their heads to keep them silent. At last, when the robbers had laid their hands upon everything that they could lift, they departed without using any great precautions, escaped with impunity, and remained unpunished, no one could well understand in what way. In consequence of this affair, my poor grandpapa, who was young when it happened, became old at a single

stroke. He has never recovered his senses, his mind is enfeebled, he has lost the recollection of almost everything except of this atrocious outrage; and he can scarcely open his mouth without an allusion to it. The trembling which you see in him he has had ever since that night; and his legs, withered up by the fire over which they held him, have remained so weak and palsied, that he could never perform the slightest labour. Your grandfather, who was a worthy gentleman, never reclaimed his money, and even forgave my grandmother, who became at once, through her good sense and courage, the head of the family, five years' arrears of rent, of which he had never required payment. This re-established our affairs, and when my father was of an age to take the Blanchemont farm, he was enabled to command a certain amount of credit. This is our history, and when joined to that of my poor sister, you see it is not a very happy one."

This recital produced a great effect on Marcelle, and the condition of the Bricolin family appeared to her still more discouraging than at first. In the midst of their prosperity these people seemed doomed to something dark and tragical. Between the lunatic and the idiot, Madame de Blanchemont felt herself oppressed with an instinctive terror and a profound melancholy. She wondered how the unfettered and luxuriant beauty of Rose could have developed itself in those scenes of catastrophe and violent struggle, where money had played so fatal a part.

Seven o'clock sounded from the cuckoo clock which the mother Bricolin kept in her own chamber, which was also encumbered by all the old rustic furniture dismissed to make way for articles of a more luxurious style in the reform which was taking place in the new house, and contiguous to that occupied by Rose and Marcelle, when little Fanchon came running joyfully to tell them that her master had arrived.

"She means Grand-Louis," said Rose; "does she think to tell us that as any great news?"

But notwithstanding a slight tone of disdain, Rose's cheek bloomed with the brightest tint of the flower of which she proudly bore the name.

"But he is come full of business, and he asks to speak to you," said Fanchon, a little disconcerted.

"To me?" said Rose, blushing more and more, and shrugging her shoulders.

"No; to Madame Marcelle," said the young girl.

Marcelle directed her steps towards the door which the little Fanchon held wide open, but when she had reached it, she was obliged to recede to leave room for one of the farmer's boys to enter, who came loaded with a trunk, followed by Grand-Louis, who carried one still heavier, and who deposited his burden on the floor with perfect ease.

"All your commissions are executed," said he, placing also a bag of crowns upon the chest of drawers.

Then, without waiting to hear the thanks of Marcelle, he cast his eyes upon the bed in which Edward was lying asleep, beautiful as a little angel. Enticed by his love for children, and by his feelings towards this engaging little fellow who was really irresistibly attractive, Grand-Louis approached to gaze upon him a little nearer, and Edward, opening his eyes, stretched out his arms to him, calling him by the name of *Alochon*, a term with which he continued to be obstinately delighted.

"How much he is improved since he came among us!" said the Miller, taking one of his little hands to kiss; but hearing a hasty movement of the curtain behind him, and turning round, Grand-Louis saw the pretty hand of Rose, who, ashamed and irritated at this invasion of her apartment, drew the embroidered curtains of her bed before her with a great noise. Grand-Louis, who was not aware that Rose had shared her chamber with Marcelle, and who had not expected to find her there, stood stupefied, repentant, and abashed, and yet without being able to detach his eyes from the white hand which remained holding awkwardly enough the fringes of the curtain together.

Marcelle then became aware of the mistake she had committed, and reproached herself for allowing her aristocratic habits unconsciously to predominate in this instance. Not being accustomed to consider a street porter at all in the light of a man, she had never thought of excluding from the apartment the farmer's man and the Miller who brought her luggage. Ashamed and repentant in her turn, she was on the point of requesting Grand-Louis, who appeared rooted to the spot, to retire quickly, when Madame Bricolin appeared at the entrance of the chamber, staring with mute horror at seeing the Miller, her mortal enemy, standing overcome with perplexity between the beds of the two young ladies.

Without uttering a word, she rushed abruptly away like a person who, having found a thief in his house, runs to seek assistance. She hastened, in short, to M. Bricolin, who was taking his *coup-de-matin* for the third time—that is to say, his third tankard of white wine, in the kitchen.

"M. Bricolin," said she in a stifled voice, "come quickly, quickly! do you hear me?"

"What's the matter?" said the farmer, who did not like to be disturbed when he was taking what he called his *refreshment*. "Is the house on fire?"

"Come and see, I tell you! Come and see what is going on!" replied his wife, who was almost suffocated with passion.

"Faith! if there is anything to be angry about," said Bricolin, who was tolerably well accustomed to the storms of his better half, "you can take it upon yourself very well without me; I don't like to be annoyed with those things."

Perceiving that he would not disturb himself, Madame Bricolin approached a little nearer, making a convulsive effort

to recover the power of articulation, for she was certainly suffering the strangulation of fury.

"Don't you disturb yourself!" she exclaimed, as soon as she could recover the power of speech, taking care, however, that the servants who were passing backwards and forwards should not hear her, "I tell you that your clown of a Miller is in Rose's chamber, and that Rose has not yet risen!"

"Ah! that is *improper*, very *improper*," said M. Bricolin, rising from his seat; "and I must go and say a couple of words to him. But no noise, wife, do you hear, on account of the girl."

"Go, and make no noise yourself, then. Ah! I hope you will believe what I say now, and that you will go and treat him like a presuming and impudent fellow as he is!"

The moment that M Bricolin went out of the kitchen, he found himself face to face with Grand-Louis

"Faith, M. Bricolin," said he, with an air of irresistible candour, "you see before you a person who is very much astonished at his own stupidity."

And he very simply recounted what he had done.

"You see very plainly that he did not do it on purpose," said Bricolin, turning to his wife.

"Is that the way you take such a thing?" she exclaimed, giving free couse to her fury.

Then she ran and shut the two doors, and returning, placed herself between the Miller and M. Bricolin, who had already offered to the offender a share of his refreshment.

"No! M. Bricolin," she cried, "I cannot understand your imbecility! Do you not see that this worthless fellow conducts himself to our daughter in a manner only suitable between people of his own class, and that we cannot submit to it any longer? It is necessary, therefore, that I should take upon myself to tell him, and to make him understand ——"

"Make him understand nothing yet, Madame Bricolin," said the farmer, raising his voice in his turn, "and leave me to do my own work as father of a family. Oh! if everything that you say were to be taken for granted, I might as well fasten my trousers with pins, that you might wear your petticoats on braces. Come, let us have no broken heads the first thing in the morning. I know what I have got to say to this young fellow, and I am not going to leave it to anybody else. Come, wife, tell Chounette to bring us a fresh pitcher of wine, and go and look after your chickens."

Madame Bricolin would have replied. Her husband took a great holly stick, which was always leaning against his chair while he was drinking, and began to beat time upon the table with all his might. This overwhelming noise so entirely drowned the sound of Madame Bricolin's voice that she was compelled to give up the contest, and leaving the room, she slapped the door with great violence behind her.

"What do you want, master?" said Chounette, running in.

M. Bricolin majestically took up the empty pitcher and handed it to her, rolling his eyes in a terrible manner. The plump Chounette grew lighter than a bird, in executing the orders of the potentate of Blanchemont.

"My poor Grand-Louis," said the great man, when they were by themselves, with a pitcher of wine between their glasses, "you must know that my wife is enraged against you. She would kill you, and did I not prevent her she would soon show you the door. We are old friends, you know; and we have need of each other, and we are not going to quarrel all in a hurry. Tell me the truth, now: I am sure my wife is mistaken. All women are either mad or fools. Come, lay your hand upon your heart and answer me."

"Go on! go on!" said Grand-Louis, in a tone that appeared to promise perfect security under that examination, and making a great effort to assume an air of carelessness and composure—sentiments very different from the emotions which he experienced at that moment.

"Well, then," said the farmer, "I like to be straightforward Are you or are you not in love with my daughter?"

"What a strange question!" replied the Miller, assuming an appearance of audacity. "What sort of answer would you like me to make? If I say *yes*, that looks like setting you at defiance; if I say *no*, that looks like an injury to Mademoiselle Rose; for she certainly deserves that everybody should be in love with her, just as you deserve that everybody should respect you."

"You are merry!—that is a good sign. I see very plainly that you are not in love."

"Stop! stop!" said Grand-Louis; "I did not say so. I say, on the contrary, that all the world is compelled to be in love with her, because she is beautiful as the day, because she is your exact image; in short, because all who see her, old and young, rich and poor, experience peculiar emotions towards her, without knowing whether it is the pleasure of loving her, or the pain of not being permitted to do so."

"He has the spirit of thirty thousand men!" said the farmer, rolling in his chair with a laugh which tore open his waistcoat. "Thunder strike me if I don't wish you were rich, and had a hundred thousand crowns; I would give you my girl in preference to anybody else."

"I believe it! but as I have not got a hundred thousand crowns, you would scarcely bestow her on me; is it not so?"

"No! thunder strike me first! But, to say the least, I regret it, and that is the proof of my friendship for you."

"Many thanks; you are too good!"

"And so you see, my jade of a wife has taken it into her head that you are cajoling Rose."

"I!" said the Miller, now speaking with the accent of truth, "I have never said a word to her that you might not have heard."

"I am sure of it. You have too much sense not to see that you must not think of my girl, and that I cannot give her to a man like you. But it is not that I despise you. No, indeed! I am not proud, and I know that all men are equal in the eyes of the law. I have not forgotten that I rose from a family of peasants, and that when my father began to realize his fortune—which he lost so unfortunately, as you know—he was no greater gentleman than you, since he was a miller also. But *au jour d'aujourd'hui*, my brave fellow, money does everything, as the proverb says; and since I have got it, and you have not got it, there can be no equal footing between us."

"That is peremptory and conclusive," said the Miller with a bitter gaiety. "It is just, reasonable, true, equitable, and salutary, as M. le Curé always begins his discourses."

"Hark you, Grand-Louis, everybody for himself. Now you are rich for a peasant, and you would not marry the servant, little Fanchon, if she were to happen to fall in love with you."

"No; but if I were to happen to fall in love with her, that would make all the difference."

"Do you mean to say by that, you great wag, that my daughter has an inclination for you?"

"When did I say such a thing?"

"I do not accuse you of having said it, though my wife maintains that you are capable of forgetting yourself, if you are allowed so much familiarity among us."

"Ah! then, M. Bricolin," said Grand-Louis, who began to lose his patience, and who had found the manner of his decision sufficiently brutal without having insult joined to it, "is it for mirth or ridicule that you have been talking in this manner to me for the last five minutes? Do you speak seriously? I have never asked you to give me your daughter, and therefore I do not see why you should give yourself the trouble of refusing her to me. I am not a man to speak of her without respect, and I do not therefore see why you should report the bad opinion which Madame Bricolin entertains against me. If it is to tell me to go, I am ready. If it is to take your business from me, I make no opposition: I have other customers. But speak freely, and let us part like honest men; for I must confess that all this has the appearance of some one wishing to make a quarrel with me, and of finding out some fault in me for the sake of hiding his own."

Grand-Louis rose as he spoke with the intention of departing, but this quarrel was neither to M. Bricolin's taste nor interest.

"What are you talking about, you silly fellow?" he answered in a friendly tone, forcing him back into his seat. "Are you mad? What fly has stung you? Did I speak seriously? Do I pay any attention to the folly of my wife? As a general rule, believe me, Grand-Louis, a wasp which comes buzzing about your ears, and a woman who teases and contradicts you, sing nearly the same song. Let us finish the pitcher and re-

main friends. My business is good, and I am satisfied with myself for having given it to you. We can mutually render little services to each other, so that we should be great simpletons to quarrel for nothing. I know that you are a fellow of sense and spirit, and that you will not cajole my daughter. Besides, I have too good an opinion of her not to think that she would repulse you pretty sharply, if you were to lose sight of that respect; and so ——"

"And so!" said Grand-Louis, striking his glass upon the table in a decided ebullition of anger, "all these reasons are useless, and end only in wearying me, M. Bricolin. What care I for your business, your little services, and my own interest, if I must be told that, only supposing I should be capable of failing in respect to your daughter, she will one day or other make me know my place. I am but a peasant, but I am as proud as you are, M. Bricolin, whether you like it or not; and if you cannot find a more delicate way of expressing your meaning to me, let me wish you a good day, and let me go about my business."

M. Bricolin had a great deal of trouble in calming Grand-Louis, who was greatly irritated; not so much at the suspicions of the farmer's wife, which he well knew he deserved in a certain sense, nor at the coarse manner of the farmer, to which he was thoroughly accustomed, but at the cruelty with which this last, without knowing it, had probed the bleeding wound of his heart. At last he was appeased after receiving the *amende honorable* from M. Bricolin, who had his own reasons for promoting peace, and for not listening to the fears of his wife, at least at that moment.

"So, then," said he, at the same time inviting him to take the first draught from a fresh tankard of wine, after the cheese, "you have a great friendship for our young lady?"

"A great friendship!" replied the Miller with the remains of offended feeling, and declining the proffered draught, notwithstanding the pressing urgency of his host; "that is a word just about as reasonable as that of *love*, of which you forbid me to speak to your daughter."

"Faith! if the word is improper, it is not I who have invented it. It was she herself who told us a great many times yesterday (it was that which enraged Thibaude so much), that she had a great friendship for you. Everybody knows that you are a handsome fellow, Grand-Louis, and they say that the great ladies —— Come, you are not angry again, are you?"

"My opinion is that you have got a tankard of wine too much in your head this morning, M. Bricolin," said the Miller, pale with indignation.

Never had the cynicism of Bricolin, which until then he had endeavoured to excuse, inspired him with so much disgust.

"And you yourself must have been emptying the sluice of your mill into your stomach this morning, for you are

as dull and pettish as a water-drinker. Nobody can crack a jest with you now. This is something new. Ah! well, let us talk seriously then, if you like. It is certain that, one way or another, you have wheedled yourself into the esteem and confidence of this young lady, and that she has entrusted you with commissions without saying a word about them to anybody else."

"I don't understand you."

"Stay! You went to ——— for her, and brought her luggage and her money. For Chounette saw you return with a great bag of crowns. In short, you are managing her affairs."

"If you like to call it so. I know that I went about my own business, and at the same time I took advantage of the opportunity to bring her trunks and her money, which she had left in charge at the inn. If that is managing her affairs, so much the better: I wish it was."

"But what is in the bag? Is it silver or gold?"

"How can I tell? I never looked into it."

"It would have cost nothing if you had, and would have done her no wrong."

"How could I guess that you were interested in it?"

"Listen, Grand-Louis, my boy, and be open. This lady has been talking to you about her affairs?"

"Where did you get that piece of news?"

"I got it *here!*" replied the farmer, lifting his forefinger to his narrow sunburnt forehead. "I feel in the air a scent of confidence and mysteries. The lady has the appearance of mistrusting me and confiding in you."

"And if it is so!" replied Grand-Louis, looking fixedly at Bricolin, with some intention of braving him.

"If it is so, Grand-Louis, I do not think you would be unfavourable to me."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean very well. I have always had a confidence in you, and I am sure you would not abuse it You know that I want to buy the land, and that I don't wish to pay too dear for it."

"I know very well that you do not wish to give its value."

"Its value! its value! That depends upon the respective position of the parties. That which would be ill sold for another would be well sold for her, to whom it is so neceesary to get out of the dilemma in which her husband has left her."

"I know that, M. Bricolin, and I know your ideas upon it, and I could count your wishes on my finger-ends. Your object is to gain fifty thousand francs by beating down this lady in the sale of her estate."

"No, not by beating her down at all! I am playing my cards openly on the table with her. I have told her the value of her property; but I have also told her that I could not give her all its value, and ten thousand million thunders strike me if I either can or will advance a single farthing."

"You talked differently not a very long time ago. You told me that you would pay its price, and if it were necessary, go beyond it."

"You rave! I never said so!"

"Excuse me; recollect yourself. It was at the fair of Cluis, in proof of which M. Grouard, the mayor, was present."

"He could not bear witness; he is dead."

"But I should be able to do so."

"You would not do it."

"That depends——"

"That depends on what?"

"That depends on you."

"How so?"

"The manner in which I am treated in your house will regulate my conduct towards you, M. Bricolin. I am tired of the rudeness of your wife, and the affronts which she offers me. I know that others are intended, that your daughter is forbidden to speak to me, to dance with me, to visit the mill to see her nurse, and all sorts of vexations of which I would not complain if I had deserved them, but which I feel to be insults when they are not merited."

"Why, is this all, Grand-Louis? A pretty present—a note for five hundred francs, for instance, will not that make all right?"

"No, sir," said the Miller, drily.

"You are a simpleton, my boy; five hundred francs in the pocket of an honest man, is worth more than dancing the *bourrée* in the dust. However, you think a great deal of dancing with my daughter."

"I think a great deal of my honour, M. Bricolin. I have always danced the *bourrée* with your daughter before all the world. Nobody ever discovered any harm in that, and if I now receive from her the affront of a refusal, it may easily be believed what is noised abroad by your wife, that I am rude and ill-bred. I must not be treated in this way. It is for you to say whether you wish to offend me—yes or no?"

"Dance with Rose, my boy; dance!" cried the farmer, with a mixture of exultation and malice. "Dance as much as you like, if that will content you!"

"Ah, well! we shall see," thought the miller, satisfied with his revenge. "But here comes the lady of Blanchemont. Your wife, with her uproar, did not give me time to offer her an account of her commissions. If she talks to me about her affairs, I will tell you her intentions."

"I will leave you alone with her," said M. Bricolin, rising; "and do not forget that you may be able to influence her intentions. She is tired of this business, and is in haste to finish it. Make her thoroughly understand that I am inflexible. I shall go and look for Thibaude, to tell her how she is to act with regard to you."

"Double deceiver!" said Grand-Louis to himself, seeing the

farmer running awkwardly away; "and to reckon upon me as his comrade in such a transaction! Ay! for only having thought me capable of being so, instead of his fifty thousand francs, I wish it may cost him twenty thousand more!"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MILLER'S MAN.

"MY dear lady," said the miller, hurriedly and in a low tone, hearing Rose approaching behind Marcelle, "I have two hundred things to say to you, but I cannot utter them all in two minutes. Besides, here (I do not speak of Mademoiselle Rose) the walls have very long ears; and if I were to walk alone with you, it would give rise to suspicions on certain affairs. In short, I must speak with you: but how can it be done?"

"There is a very simple way," replied Madame de Blanchemont. "I shall take my walk to-day, and I can very easily find my way to Angibault."

"And, if Mademoiselle Rose would show it to you," said Grand-Louis, at the moment that Rose entered, and heard the last words of Marcelle; "if, indeed," he added, "she is not too angry with me."

"Ah, you great blunderer! you will cause my mother to scold me in a fine way," replied Rose. "She has not said anything to me yet; but with her, what is deferred is not lost."

"No, Mademoiselle Rose; no, you have nothing to fear. Your mother this time will not say a word. I have justified myself. Your father has forgiven me; he has undertaken to appease Madame Bricolin; and provided that you do not bear me any ill-will for my stupidity——"

"Do not say any more about it to me," said Rose, blushing, "and I will not to you; only you should not have made your explanations in such a loud voice, when you went out of the room. You awoke me with the fright."

"You were asleep then? I thought not."

"Come, come; you were not asleep, little cheat!" said Marcelle, "since you drew your curtains in such a passion."

"I was half asleep," said Rose, endeavouring to hide her embarrassment under an air of anger.

"But the plainest part of this affair," said the miller, with an air of ingenuous sorrow, "is that she is displeased with me."

"No, Louis; I forgive thee since thou knewest not that I was there," said Rose, who had been too long a time in the habit of saying *thee* and *thou* to Grand-Louis, the friend of her infancy, not to fall into it again—it might be from absence of

mind, it might be from design. She well knew that a single word from her mouth, accompanied by the delicious pronoun *thou*, changed into swelling joy all the sorrows of her lover.

"And yet," said the miller, whose eyes sparkled with pleasure, "you will not take your walk to-day to the mill with Madame Marcelle?"

"How can I, Grand-Louis, since my mother has forbidden me, I know not why?"

"Your father will permit you. I have been lamenting to him the harshness of Madame Bricolin, of which he disapproves, and he has promised to remove the prejudices which she entertains against me—I know not why, any more than you do."

"Ah! all the better, if it is so!" cried Rose with warmth. "We will go on horseback—shall we not, Madame Marcelle? You shall mount my little mare, and I will take my father's pony. It is very gentle, and goes very quickly too."

"And I," said Edward—"I will go on horseback also."

"That is not so easy," replied Marcelle. "I dare not take you behind me, my dear."

"Neither dare I," said Rose; "our horses are a little too spirited."

"Oh! I must go to Angibault," cried the child. "Mamma, take me to the mill!"

"It is too far for your little legs," said the miller; "but I will take charge of you, if your mamma will consent. We will go together in my cart, and you can see the cows milked, so that these ladies may find the cream ready when they come."

"You may well trust him," said Rose to Marcelle; "he is so kind to children! I know that from experience."

"Oh, you were then so gentle and so good!" said the miller tenderly; "you ought, indeed, always to have remained just what you were then."

"Thanks for the compliment, Grand-Louis."

"I do not wish to say that you are no longer amiable, but that you should always have remained a child. You loved me so much in those old times! You would never leave me, and were always hanging round my neck."

"It would be amusing," said Rose, half confused and half jesting, "if I had continued the habit."

"Come," said the miller, addressing Marcelle, "I will take your little boy with me, if you will allow me."

"I entrust him to you with perfect confidence," said Marcelle, placing her child in his arms.

"Oh! I am so delighted!" cried the child. "*Alochon*, you must hold me up in your arms, and let me gather the black plums from the trees the whole length of the way."

"Oh! certainly, my little gentleman, on condition that you will not let them fall down upon my nose."

Grand-Louis cheerfully pursued his way in his cart with the beautiful little Edward, who made his heart beat by recalling the grace, the sportiveness, and the caresses of Rose when she

was a child. Approaching the mill, he perceived Henry Lémor in the fields, who had come to meet him, but who retraced his steps, and returned precipitately into the house, on seeing Edward by the miller's side.

"Lead Sophia into the field," said Grand-Louis to his mill-boy, drawing up at some little distance from the door; "and will you, mother, amuse this little fellow? Take as much care of him as of the apple of your eye, while I go and say a word or two at the mill."

Having thus disposed of the child, he hastily sought Lémor, whom he found shut up in his chamber, and who, having opened the door with precaution, said to him—

"The child knows me. I must avoid his notice."

"And who would have thought of finding you here yet?" exclaimed the miller, who was surprised to see that he had returned. "You bade me farewell this morning, and I believed you had already set sail for Africa. What knight-errant, or what troubled spirit are you, then?"

"I am indeed a troubled spirit, my friend; but you must have some compassion on me. I travelled a league; I sat down on the edge of a fountain; I dreamed a dream; I wept, and I am returned. I feel that I cannot go!"

"Ah, well! I like you all the better for it!" cried the miller, shaking him warmly by the hand. "I have done just the same sort of thing a hundred times. Oh, yes! more than a hundred times I have left Blanchemont, swearing that I would never set my foot in the place again; and I have always sat down on the edge of some fountain to vent my grief, and doing so generally had the effect of making me return to the place from whence I came. But now, listen, my friend: it is necessary to be upon your guard. I wish you would remain here until you have made up your mind what you will do, and where you will go. I foresee that will be a long while; but all the better, for I have a friendship for you. You know that I was unwilling to let you go this morning, and I am very happy that you have come back, and I thank you for returning here. But for a few hours you must keep yourself concealed. *They* are coming here."

"Both of them?" exclaimed Lémor, who instantly comprehended to whom Grand-Louis referred.

"Yes, both. I have not had an opportunity of saying a word about you to Madame de Blanchemont. She is coming here that I may talk to her about money matters, without imagining that I want to talk to her about affairs of the heart as well. I do not wish her to know that you are here, before I can be sure that she will not be displeased with me for bringing you to this place. Besides, I do not wish to surprise her, especially before Rose, who certainly cannot know anything about this affair. So, you see, you had better keep yourself shut up. They had ordered their horses when I came away. They had already breakfasted like all fine ladies—that is to say, they had

eaten about as much as a couple of linnets; and I am sure they will put their horses to a good round trot, so that they may be here at any moment."

"I go! I fly!" said Lémor, pale and trembling. "Ah! my friend, and is she coming here?"

"I understand you. It touches your heart not to see her. Yes, it is hard, I must acknowledge. If I could depend upon you; if you would swear not to show yourself; if you would not stir a foot, nor make the slightest noise all the time she may be here, I would hide you in a place where you could see her without being seen."

"Oh! my dear Grand-Louis, my excellent friend, I promise —I swear! Hide me, if only under the grindstones of your mill."

"Oh! that would not be a very enviable place. Grand'-Louise has rather harder bones than you; you shall have rather a softer squeeze. You shall go up into my hayloft, and from the opening of the skylight you can see the ladies pass backwards and forwards. I shall not be sorry if you see Rose Bricolin, and you shall tell me if you have seen many duchesses more beautiful in Paris. But you must stop here while I go and see what is going on."

And Grand-Louis climbed up a little way the side of the hill, from whence he could discover the towers of Blanchemont, and command a view of nearly the whole road which led thither. When he had ascertained that the two equestrians were not yet in sight, he returned to his prisoner.

"Comrade," said he, "here is a mirror that cost two sous, and a true miller's razor. You must discard that goat's beard of yours; it only makes a nest for the flour, and is quite out of place in a mill. After that, if any one should catch a glimpse of your visage, the alteration would make you much less easily recognised."

"You are right," replied Lémor, "and I will follow your advice as quickly as possible."

"Do you know," replied the miller, "that I have a reason in my head for making you lay aside that black fleece?"

"What is it?"

"I have been considering, and I have arrived at this conclusion:—You shall take up your abode with me, until you have decided not to occasion my dear Madame de Blanchemont any more anxiety, and until your foolish ideas respecting her fortune shall be changed. If you only remain here even a few days, it must not be known who you are; and your beard, which gives you the appearance of a Parisian, draws all eyes upon you. I told my good woman of a mother last night, extravagantly enough, that you were a surveyor. It was the first deceit that I could think of, but it was absurd. I should have done better if I had acknowledged the truth at once. But even now, my mother, who is never surprised at anything, would find it all quite natural for the surveyor to change into the

mechanic; so you shall turn into a miller, and that will be better still. You shall occupy yourself, or you shall appear to occupy yourself, with the business of the mill. You have certainly sufficient ability to act the part; and you shall pretend to be here to consult me about establishing a new sort of grindstone. It will appear as if I had met you accidentally in the town, and we had made the chance conduce to business. In that way, your presence here will not surprise anybody. I am an adjoint—I shall answer for you; and no one will demand to see your passport. Our *garde champêtre* may be a little curious and talkative, but a pint or two of wine will make him hold his tongue. This is my plan, and you must either act upon it or I must give you up."

"I agree—I will be miller's man—I will conceal myself, provided that I do not go without seeing her once again, though only from here, and for an instant!"

"Silence! I hear the sound of iron upon the stones—*tric-trac;* that is Mademoiselle Rose's black mare: *tric-trac*—that is M. Bricolin's black pony. Come, now: this change has made you look a hundred times better. Run to the loft, and close the shutters of the window. You can easily look through the chink If my boy comes up, pretend to be asleep. An afternoon's nap in the loft is an indulgence which country people often take; and it does appear to be an occupation rather more Christian-like than sitting all alone meditating with crossed arms and open eyes. Adieu! There is Mademoiselle Rose. There! the first in advance, coming trotting so lightly, and with such an air of decision."

"Beautiful as an angel!" said Lémor, who had looked at no one but Marcelle.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE BANKS OF THE RIVER.

GRAND-LOUIS, who possessed all the delicacy of a really impassioned heart, had given orders in passing that a collation of milk and various fruits should be served under an arbour of trellis-work, formed of the rich foliage of the vine, which ornamented the front of his house exactly opposite, and a very short distance from the mill, where Lémor, crouched in his granary, could see and even hear Marcelle.

This rustic collation was very cheerful and agreeable, thanks to the roguish frolics of little Edward with the Miller, and to Rose's charmingly coquettish manner towards him.

"Take care, Rose," said Madame de Blanchemont, in a whisper, to the young girl; "you are making yourself adorable

to-day, and you see very plainly that you are turning his brain. It appears to me that you have either been laughing at all my sermons very much, or else that you are making yourself too agreeable."

Rose appeared perplexed, remained a moment in a reverie, but soon resumed her coquettish vivacity, as if she had formed an inward determination to accept the love she was exciting. She had always at the bottom of her heart cherished a lively friendship for Grand-Louis; it was, therefore, scarcely probable that she would amuse herself at his expense, by thus encouraging sentiments, without feeling in her own heart some advance towards their return. The Miller, without wishing to flatter himself, experienced a species of instinctive confidence; and his upright mind told him, that Rose was too good and too pure to torment him so unfeelingly if his hopes were groundless.

He found himself, therefore, very happy to see her sitting by his side so full of joy and animation, and it was with reluctance that he at last left her at table with his mother; but he had seen Marcelle retire to a little distance, and make him a sign by stealth that he should follow her to the other side of the river.

"Ah, well, my dear Grand-Louis!" said Madame de Blanchemont, "it appears to me that you are not quite so sorrowful as you were the other day, and that I am able to guess the cause."

"Ah, Madame Marcelle! you know all, and I see very plainly that I have nothing to tell you. It is you, perhaps, who have it in your power to tell me more than I know; for you possess everybody's confidence, as indeed you most justly deserve."

"I must not compromise Rose," said Marcelle, smiling: "women ought not to betray each other. However, I believe that I may hope with you, that it is not quite impossible that you should be loved."

"Ah! if I were loved I should be fully satisfied, and I believe that I should ask no more, for I should die with joy the very day on which she told me so."

"My friend, you love nobly and sincerely, and it is because your passion is thus exalted that you ought not to desire its return, without endeavouring first to overcome the obstacles which intervene on the part of her family. I presume that it was on this account that you have made a sort of coalition with me, and it was on this account that I yielded so readily to your invitation. The time is precious, for doubtless we shall soon be interrupted. And now, how can I influence the opinions of her father, as Rose has hinted to me?"

"Rose has hinted that to you!" cried the Miller, with a sort of transport. "She has thought of me, then! She loves me, then! Ah, Madame Marcelle! and you did not tell me that directly! Ah! of what consequence is all the rest if she only loves me—if she is only willing to marry me!"

"Softly, my friend! Rose is not yet engaged to you. She entertains for you the affection of a sister; and she was desirous that sentence should be revoked which interdicted her from speaking to you, of coming to see you—in short, of treating you like a friend, as she had been accustomed to do. Now you understand the reason why she wished me to take an interest in you, so as to soften the discontent of her parents by consulting you on my own affairs, and acting in concert with you with some decision. And now I will tell you what I imagine to be the case, Grand-Louis. M. Bricolin wishes to buy my estate a bargain; and, perhaps, if Rose loved you, I might ensure both your happiness and hers, by stipulating that your marriage should be one of the conditions on which only I would consent If you think so, do not doubt that I shall be very happy to make this slight sacrifice."

"This slight sacrifice! You cannot think this a slight sacrifice, Madame Marcelle! You must believe that you are still rich, for you talk about fifty thousand francs as if they were nothing. You forget that this henceforth must be a part of your very subsistence; and can you think that I would accept such a sacrifice? Oh! I would rather renounce Rose this very moment!"

"That is because you do not comprehend the true value of money, my friend. Money is but a means of happiness; and the happiness which we can secure for others is the most certain and the most pure that we can procure for ourselves."

"You are good, you are heavenly, my poor lady! but there is another happiness for you still more pure and certain. it is in the careful protection of the interests of your son. And what would you one day say if, for the sake of these fifty thousand francs, which you would sacrifice for your friends, your dear Edward should be compelled, in his turn, to renounce a woman that he loved, and whom you could no longer help him to obtain?"

"You touch my heart with these generous arguments; but, in these considerations of worldly interests, there can be no absolute or accurate calculation for the future. My position is not so rigidly fixed as you imagine. In abstaining from the sale of my estate, I lose time; and, as you well know, each day of hesitation accelerates my ruin. In concluding the arrangement of this business quickly, I free myself from all anxiety as to these debts; and perhaps I may one day not repent having acted without puerile regret and misplaced parsimony. You perceive, then, that I am not so generous as you imagined, and that I am following my own interests in serving those of your affections."

"Ah! see what a poor head you have for business!" cried the Miller, with a tender and sorrowful smile. "A saint from paradise could not have spoken better; but you must permit me to tell you that you have not uttered a word of common sense, my dear lady. You will find purchasers for your estate within

the next fortnight, who will be willing to pay you your own price."

"But who will not be solvent, like M. Bricolin."

"Oh, yes! That is nothing but his pride. It is his boast to be solvent. *Solvent!* What a great word! He believes himself to be the only person in the world who can say, 'I am out of debt!' He knows very well that there are other purchasers equally eligible, but he wishes to dazzle and confuse your understanding. You must not listen to him; he is a cunning rogue! Only appear to be concluding a negotiation with somebody else, and pretend to be going on with proceedings and entering into contracts. I would not stand on ceremony in your place. '*A la guerre, comme à la guerre:*' 'Fight the man with his own weapons.' Will you leave me to act? In a fortnight, I assure you, as certainly as you look upon this water, M. Bricolin will give you three hundred thousand francs, well counted, and a bottle of wine into the bargain."

"I have not the resolution to follow your advice, and I should be able a great deal more quickly to render happy you, Rose, and myself, M. Bricolin and my son, who will at some future day tell me that I have done well."

"Romance! nonsense!" exclaimed the Miller. "You cannot tell what your son will think fifteen years hence about money and love. You must not commit such a folly, Madame Marcelle, and, for my own part, I cannot lend myself to it. I am too proud to connive at what ought not to be done; for I am as headstrong as a sheep of Berry, which is the most obstinate of the whole species. Besides, listen to me: this would be an entire loss M. Bricolin promises everything and performs nothing. It is necessary that the contract of sale should be signed before the end of the month; and certainly I could not hope to marry Rose before the end of the month. To accomplish such a hasty match, she must be very madly in love with me, which I am sure she is not. What a commotion and what scandal it would excite! I feel that I could never subject her to all the persecution she would have to endure. What scolding she would have to bear from her mother, and what astonishment and unkind reflections from her neighbours and acquaintances! What would people say? Who would be able to comprehend that you had imposed this condition on M. Bricolin from pure greatness of soul and generous friendship for us? You know nothing of the malice of men; and, as for the malice of women——Ah, if you knew what that is! Your goodness to me—no, you cannot imagine, and I dare not tell you in what way M. Bricolin would be the first to misinterpret it; and still further, you know not how Rose would suffer from their slanders. In short, this arrangement is impossible, and I hope I have offered you sufficient reasons to convince you. Oh, no! it is not in this way that I should desire to obtain Rose. This must be brought about naturally, and without exciting a single

outcry against her, or a single reflection upon her. I know perfectly well that it requires a miracle to make me rich, or some great misfortune for her to be reduced to poverty, so that we might stand on an equality; but Providence will help me, if she loves me—and perhaps she will love me—don't you think so?"

"But, my friend, I cannot assist in influencing her feelings towards you, if you deprive me of the means of triumphing over the mercenary spirit of her father. If I had not arranged my plans and trusted to their issue, I should not have interfered; for it would be an actual crime, on my part, to urge this charming girl into an unhappy passion."

"Ah, that is true!" exclaimed Grand-Louis, suddenly subdued; "I see that I am an idiot!—but it was neither of myself nor of Rose that I wished to speak in begging you to come here, Madame Marcelle. You have deceived yourself in that through your own great kindness. I wished to talk to you about your own affairs, and you have prevented me by talking only about mine; and I have been led to listen to you like a great baby, and then have felt compelled to answer you; but I must now return to my true object, which is—to oblige you to turn your attention to your own affairs. I know all M. Bricolin's concerns; I know his intentions and his ardent desire to purchase your property. He will not let go his hold; and, to have three hundred thousand francs, it is necessary that we ask three hundred and fifty thousand francs. You will assuredly get it if you are obstinate; but, in every way, he must not have it for less than its value; and he has too great a desire to obtain the estate to draw back: so do not fear."

"I repeat to you, my friend, that I am not able to support this struggle with him—this bargaining and disputing: the two days in which I have been compelled to endure it have almost worn out my strength."

"It is not necessary that you should bear it any longer, or even be mixed up in this business at all. You must place your affairs in the hands of some able and honest attorney. I know one, and I will speak to him about it to-night, and you can see him yourself to-morrow without the least inconvenience. To-morrow is the *fête* of the patron saint of Blanchemont, and there will be a great gathering of the country people on the little hill before the church. The lawyer will come there to walk and chat with his clients, according to custom; and you can be there like the rest of the assembly, and enter one of the houses as if by accident, where he will be awaiting your arrival. You can say to him in a couple of words, and I shall explain to him in twice as many, what you desire to have done, and you can sign a power of attorney, and then you will have nothing more to do than to send him to bargain with M. Bricolin. If he does not agree, your lawyer will find you another purchaser. It will only require a little prudence to avoid en-

trusting this affair to the man of business that, without doubt, M. Bricolin has himself recommended, and whom, perhaps, you have already been so unwise as to employ."

"No. I promised you to do nothing without your advice."

"That is fortunate! Go then to-morrow, about ten o'clock, and walk on the banks of the Vauvre, as if you went to amuse yourself with looking at the pretty effect of the *fête* upon the hill. I shall be there; and I will introduce you to a person on whom you may entirely depend."

"But, my friend, if M. Bricolin discovers that you are influencing this affair against his interests, he will drive you from his house, and you will never be allowed to see Rose again."

"He will be very clever if he find it out; but, if such a misfortune should happen, I know that I should be assisted by a miracle, and the more so because I should have done my duty."

"My true and faithful friend, I cannot resolve to expose you to this danger."

"And I cannot do less, when you would have ruined yourself for me. Come, this is childishness, my dear lady: we are only quits."

"You see Rose is coming towards us," said Marcelle; "I have scarcely time to thank you——"

"No: Mademoiselle Rose is turning down the walk on the other side with my mother, for I gave her a hint that I wished to speak to you in private; and I have not finished, Madame Marcelle—I have still something more to say. But you will be tired of walking such a long time. As the place is unoccupied, and the mill is silent, come and let us sit down upon the bench before the door. Mademoiselle Rose thinks we are on the other side, and will return this way after having made the round of the field. What I have to say to you is rather more interesting to you than affairs of business, and requires to be more secret still."

Marcelle, surprised at this preamble, followed the Miller, and sat down with him upon the wooden bench just below the window of the loft, where, from the place of his concealment, Lémor could both see and hear what was passing.

"Will you tell me, Madame Marcelle," stammered out the Miller, a little embarrassed how to enter on the subject, "if you recollect the letter which you entrusted to me?"

"Well, my dear Grand-Louis," replied Madame de Blanchemont, whose calm countenance became in a moment a little excited, "did you not tell me this morning that you had sent it?"

"Forgive me—but I did not put it in the post."

"You forgot it?"

"Oh, certainly not."

"Lost it, perhaps?"

"Still less likely. I did better with it than drop it into the letter-box: I presented it as it was addressed."

"What do you mean to say? It was addressed to Paris."

"Yes; but having found in my way the person for whom it was intended, I thought it better to place it in his hands."

"You make me tremble, Louis!" exclaimed Marcelle, turning very pale. "You have made some mistake!"

"I have not committed such an act of stupidity. Perhaps I may know M. Henry Lémor quite well."

"You know him! and he is in the country here?" said Marcelle, with an emotion which she did not endeavour to dissemble.

In very few words Grand-Louis explained that he already knew Lémor, as he was really the traveller whose visit to the mill had excited her curiosity, and how the letter which she had entrusted to him had reached its destination.

"And where was he going? and what was he doing at ——?" inquired Marcelle, almost overwhelmed with this intelligence.

"He was passing through on his way to Africa," replied the Miller, who wished to see the effect of his intelligence. "It is the best way to travel by Toulouse. He had taken advantage of the breakfast-hour, while the diligence stopped, to go to the post-office."

"And where is he now?"

"I cannot very well tell you where he may possibly be, but certainly he is no longer at —— "

"You tell me, then, that he has gone to Africa? And why so far?"

"Precisely because it is so far. It was exactly so that he answered the same question."

"The answer is clearer than you imagine," said Marcelle, whose agitation increased, and who never thought of endeavouring to conceal it. "My friend, you are not the most unhappy, though you may believe you are; there are other hearts more broken than yours!"

"Yours, for example, my poor dear lady?"

"Yes, my friend—mine."

"But is it not a little your own fault? Why did you order that poor young man to remain a whole year away without getting a word from you?"

"What! Has he then shown you my letter?"

"Oh, no! He was very mistrustful and mysterious about that; but I questioned him so much, besieged him so much, guessed so much, that he was forced to confess that I was not mistaken. Ah, Madame Marcelle, you see I am very curious about the secrets of those that I love; because, if we do not know what they wish, how can we be useful to them? Have I done wrong?"

"No, my friend; I am happy that you should know my secrets, just as I know yours. But, alas! in this case, with all your good-will and your good heart, you can do nothing for me! Answer me one thing, however. Did this young man send no answer, either verbally or by writing?"

"He wrote. this morning, a heap of idle trash to you, of which I would not take charge."

"That was unkind! I might have known his intentions from it."

"He said nothing but this: 'I love her, *but* I have courage!'"

"He said '*but?*'"

"Perhaps he said '*and!*'"

"That would be so different. Recollect yourself, Grand-Louis."

"He said sometimes one and sometimes the other, for he repeated it very often."

"This morning, did you say? Then you have only left the town this morning?"

"I should have said last night. It was late: and among us we call it morning after midnight."

"What can it mean! But why no letter? You saw, then, what he wrote to me?"

"A little of it; but he tore it into pieces."

"But what was in these letters? He must have been in a state of irresolution."

"Sometimes he would say that he would never see you again; and sometimes that he would fly to you that moment."

"And he has resisted this last temptation? Ah, then, he has indeed had courage!"

"Believe me, it was a greater temptation than St. Anthony's; but on the one side I dissuaded him, and on the other he feared to disobey you."

"And what do you think of a lover who knows not how to disobey?"

"I think that he loves too well, and that such a proof of affection will meet no one's wishes."

"I am unjust, am I not, my dear Grand-Louis? and I am too much agitated to know what I am saying. But why, my friend, did you prevent him from following me, for he seems to have had the wish?"

"Oh, I am sure of that! He even went to the end of the road in my cart. But, excuse me; I am too much afraid of offending you."

"But, if you love yourself, how can you imagine that others who love could be so severe?"

"Ah! but what would you have said if I had brought him with me to the Black Valley? For instance, if I were to say to you now, that I had agreed to hide him in my mill? Ah! I know that in a moment you would treat me as I deserved!"

"Louis!" said Marcelle, rising with an air of exalted resolution, "he is here! You admit it!"

"Not so, madam; you led me into speaking in that way."

"My friend," said she, taking his hand with emotion, "tell me where he is, and I will forgive you!"

"And if it were so," replied the Miller, a little alarmed at the spontaneous energy which was manifested by Marcelle, but

struck with enthusiastic admiration of her frankness, "are you not afraid of exciting scandal respecting your affairs?"

"When he left me voluntarily, and when my spirit was broken down, I thought of the world, foreseeing the dangers which I ran in provoking its censures, and my ideas of rigid duty were perhaps a little exaggerated, but when he retraces his steps—when he is so near me—of what should I think? what should I fear?"

"It is necessary, however, to be cautious that you may not render your plans more difficult to execute," said Grand-Louis, making a sign to Marcelle to direct her attention to the window above her head.

Marcelle raised her eyes, and met those of Lémor, who, leaning towards her in great agitation, was ready to leap from the top of the roof, so as to shorten the distance which divided them.

But the Miller coughed with all his might, and made a sign to warn them that Rose was approaching with his mother and little Edward.

"Yes, madam," said he raising his voice, "a mill like this produces very little; but if I can only erect a great millstone, which I have some idea of doing, it will produce much more—eight hundred good francs a-year."

CHAPTER XXIII.

CADOCHE.

The look which the two lovers had exchanged had been rapid and impassioned, but a perfect calm succeeded that emotion; for they felt that they were assured of each other's truth. They had said everything, explained everything, and a world of mutual persuasion had passed in the electric shock of that interchanged glance. Lémor then withdrew into his loft, and Marcelle, in perfect self-possession, because in perfect happiness, received Rose without emotion or regret. She suffered herself to be led away into the delicious neighbouring grove, and after an hour's ramble remounted her horse with her companion, and retraced her way to Blanchemont, after having murmured in a low voice to the Miller—

"Keep him concealed, and I will return."

"No, no—not too soon," replied Grand-Louis, "I will arrange an interview without running any risk; only leave me to take my own measures. I will bring your boy back to-night, and talk to you again if I can find an opportunity."

When Marcelle had gone, Lémor came out of his hiding-place, when joy and emotion more than the intoxicating odour of the hay had already begun to turn his brain.

"Friend," said he gaily to the Miller, "I am a miller's boy, and I must not pretend to be living at your expense without doing my proper work. Give me then some employment, and you shall see that the Parisian's arms are strong enough, notwithstanding his slight appearance."

"Yes," replied Grand-Louis, "where the heart is easy the arms are pliant. Your affairs are in better train than mine, my boy; and when we have our chat to-night, it will be your turn to encourage me. But at present, as you say, it is better to be occupied. I cannot spend my time in talking about love, and you will become mad with joy if you remain in idleness. Work is salutary for us all; and between the emotions of joy and the distractions of pain, it was perhaps intended for us all in the designs of a good Providence. Come, then; you shall help me to lift the sluice and set my *Grand'Louise* into a dance. Her song has always the effect of putting me in spirits when I am out of sorts."

"Ah! the child will know me," exclaimed Lémor, perceiving Edward, who had escaped from the arms of the Miller's mother, and was hastily climbing the steep staircase of the mill upon his hands and feet.

"He has already seen you," replied the Miller; "do not hide yourself, and do not take any notice. There is no certainty that he will know you, disguised as you are."

In fact, Edward paused in doubt and uncertainty. A month back Marcelle had quitted Montmorency abruptly, to take her place by the bedside of her dying husband, and her son had not seen Lémor during that time, and a month is an age in the memory of so young a child. Edward, however, was an exception, from the precocious development of his faculties; but Lémor, without his beard, his face covered with flour, and attired in a peasants blouse, was scarcely recognisable. Edward stood looking at him for more than a minute as if he were petrified; but, having met the severe and indifferent gaze of the friend who generally ran to meet him with open arms, his eyes dropped with a sort of embarrassment mingled with fear—sentiments which in the minds of children are almost always mixed with astonishment; and then, approaching the Miller with that serious and meditative air which he often assumed, he asked—"Who is that man there?"

"That? Oh, that is my boy of the mill. That is Antony."

"Then you have got two?"

"Yes! I have these boys by dozens. The one there is *Alochon*, number two."

"And Jeannie is *Alochon* number three?"

"Exactly so, general."

"Is that Antony of yours wicked?"

"No, no! but he is rather stupid, and rather deaf, and never plays with children."

"In that case I will go and play with Johnny," said Edward, walking away with indifference.

At four years of age a child is easily convinced, and the word of those that they love has more power over their mind than the testimony of their senses.

The miller and his new assistant now brought the wheat which was to be reduced to flour on that night. It belonged to M. Bricolin, and was contained in a couple of sacks, each of which was marked with two enormous initials.

"Look!" said Grand-Louis, and this time there was a little bitterness in his laugh. "*Bricolin de Blanchemont*, as much as to say Bricolin living at Blanchemont. When he has bought the estate he will have to put in another little *b* between these great ones—that would read, *Bricolin*, Baron of Blanchemont."

"How," said Lémor, who was occupied with very different thoughts, "Is this wheat from Blanchemont?"

"Yes," replied the miller, who guessed beforehand what he would say, "this is the wheat which shall be the flour—which shall be the bread—which shall be eaten by Madame Marcelle, and Mademoiselle Rose. People say that Rose is too rich to marry a man like me, and yet it is true that I supply her with the very bread that she eats."

"Then we are working for them!" replied Lémor. "Yes, yes!—obey orders, boy. The mill will not go round for a bad workman. I should not work for the king with so good a heart."

This circumstance, so common in the routine of the mill, assumed a romantic and almost a poetic colouring in the brain of the young Parisian, and he set himself to help the miller with so much care and zeal, that at the end of a couple of hours he was perfectly competent to the work. It was not difficult for him to accustom himself to the elementary and almost barbarous mechanism of the concern. He perceived the improvements and modifications which by the help of a little money (forbidden fruit to the peasant), he should be able to introduce into the rustic machine. He very soon acquired, in the rural phraseology of the district, the technical names of every part and the respective functions of each. Johnny, the miller's boy, seeing him so active, and so well treated by his master, felt a little disquieted and jealous. Grand-Louis, seeing this feeling, took care to explain to him that the Parisian was only there for a short time, and that his situation was not in the slightest danger; and Johnny consequently felt reassured, and even determined, like a good Berrichon as he was, to give up his work for some hours every day to his officious companion. He also profited by the opportunity thus afforded him, to accompany Edward back to Blanchemont, for the child began to feel weary, and grew timid of being so long separated from Madame de Blanchemont. The miller's mother was unable to continue finding him amusement, and the little Fanchon having come to fetch him back, Jeannie was not sorry to accompany his young companion to the château.

When his task was finished, Lémor, with an animated coun-

tenance, though with a forehead bathed in perspiration, felt himself more pliant in body, and more determined in spirit, than he had been for a long time previously. The morbid reveries which had consumed his youth, gave place to that sort of moral and physical state of well-being, and of healthful satisfaction which Providence has attached to the labour of some as its immediate rewards, when that exertion is devoted to a laudable object, and the fatigue bears a just proportion to the bodily strength.

"My friend," exclaimed Lemor, "labour is good and beneficial even for its own sake. You were right in saying this. God has imposed it upon man as a blessing; and our own exertions have been invested with a charm derived from the thought, that we have been working to produce the actual nourishment of those we love. Ah! it will be still sweeter, when the time shall arrive, to labour to supply the aliment of life to a great human family of equals and of brothers. When each shall labour for all and all for each, how light will be the fatigue!—how happy will be the life!"

"Yes, when that time comes my business will be one of the most genteel," replied the miller, with a smile of arch intelligence. "Wheat is the most noble of vegetable productions, and bread the purest of human aliment. My occupation will then deserve to be held in some esteem, and on fête-days they can crown Grand'Louise with ears of wheat and corn-roses, though nobody now pays her the least attention. What would you have?—*au jour d'aujourd'hui*, as M. Bricolin says, I am but a mercenary, a paid servant in his employment, and as he says to himself when he is thinking of me, "a man *like that* to dream of having *my* daughter!—a low person who only grinds the wheat, while I sow the corn and possess the land, and yet what great difference can you find out between us? My hands are cleaner than his, who labours on a dunghill. You understand all that. Come along my boy, our work is done, let us eat our soup. I would lay a wager that you will think it much better than you did this morning, even were it ten times worse, and then I must go to Blanchemont with these two sacks."

"Without me?"

"Without you! Certainly. You have then a great wish to be seen at the farm?"

"Nobody knows me there."

"That is true. But what would you do there?"

"Nothing, but help you to unload the sacks."

"And what good end would that answer?"

"I might perhaps see *somebody* pass through the court-yard."

"And if *somebody* did not pass?"

"I should see the house where she dwells. I might hear the sound of her name."

"It is my opinion that that is a pleasure which we can easily give ourselves, without going so far."

"It is only a couple of steps from here."

"You have an answer for everything. Do you wish to commit an imprudence?"

"You think that I do not know what love is. Would you not do the same in my place yourself?"

"Perhaps I might if I were loved in return. Let us see, you will not look at her as you did from the window this morning? Do you know that I was afraid you would set fire to my hay-loft with your blazing eyes"

"I will not even look at her."

"And you will not even speak to her."

"What pretext could I make for speaking to her?"

"And you will not seek for one?'

"I will not even enter into the court-yard, if you forbid me. I will only look at the walls from a distance."

"That would be the wisest. I will only just allow you to scent at the door the wind that passes over the house, and nothing more."

At sunset the two friends took their way towards Blanchemont, Sophia loaded with her two sacks, walking majestically on before them. Grand-Louis, whose heart was sorrowful, spoke but little, and the only expression of his gloomy feelings was to be found in the perpetual lashing of his long whip to the right and left of the bushes on either side loaded with blackberries; and where the pale honeysuckles diffused a more balmy odour than is ever exhaled from those cultivated in our gardens. They had passed a group of thatched cottages, which they called *le Cortioux*, where Lémor, who was keeping close to the ditch which bordered the way, suddenly stopped, surprised to find a man stretched all his length under the hedge, his head pillowed on a well-filled wallet.

"Oh, oh!" said the miller, without the least surprise, "you have almost walked over *my uncle*."

The sonorous voice of Grand-Louis woke the sleeper, who rose with a start, and seizing with both hands a great stick which was lying by his side, he articulated an energetic oath.

"Don't disturb yourself, uncle," said the miller, laughing, "we are only friends passing with your permission; for though the road ought to belong to you, as you say, you will not prevent us from using it, will you?"

"Ay, indeed!" he replied, and the man stood upright before them with his gigantic stature and his repulsive aspect; "I am the best of proprietors, as you know, my little one: but would it not be rather abusing my good nature to walk over me. And pray, what bad Christian have you got here, who cannot see an honest man stretched upon his bed? I don't know him, though I know everybody both here and everywhere else!"

While speaking, the mendicant measured Lémor from head to foot with an air of disdain, and he, on his side, surveyed him with a feeling of repugnance. He was a bony old man covered

with dirty clothing, and his beard of mingled black and white, resembled a bristling hedge-hog. His high-crowned hat, almost torn into shreds, was surmounted, as if it had been placed there as a trophy of derision, with a bow of white ribbons, and a *bouquet* of artificial flowers miserably faded.

"Be satisfied, uncle," said the miller, "he is a good Christian, I assure you."

"And how are we to know that?" replied Uncle Cadoche, taking off his hat and holding it out to Henry.

"Come," said the miller to Lémor, "you do not understand him. My uncle asks you for a sou."

Lémor threw a piece of money into the hat of the "uncle," who immediately took it out, and turned it over and over in his long fingers with a sort of satisfied enjoyment.

"This is a great sou!" said he, with a smile of avaricious satisfaction.) "Perhaps it may be a revolutionary decime piece? No, no! Nothing of the sort! This is a Louis the Fifteenth, this is my own king! A king whose reign I have lived in! this will bring me good fortune, and you also, nephew," added he, laying his great hooked hand upon the shoulder of Lémor, "you may say now that you are one of my family, and I should know you even if you were disguised from head to foot."

"Come, come, we must be going; good-night, uncle," said the Miller, adding his charitable offering to that of Lemor, "are we friends?"

"Always!" replied the beggar, in a solemn voice; "you have always been a good relation to me, and the best of all my family. And so I shall leave all my wealth to you, Grand-Louis. I have said so a long while, and you will see whether I shall keep my word."

"Ah, well, I shall depend upon that," cheerfully replied the Miller, "shall I have that *bouquet* of yours, also?"

"You shall have my hat, but the *bouquet* and the ribbon are for my last mistress."

"No, no, I shall not give up the *bouquet!*"

"I quite believe it!" replied the mendicant, who had begun to walk behind the two young men, and who possessed sufficient alertness to keep pace with them, notwithstanding his great age, "the *bouquet* is the most valuable part of the inheritance. It is blessed, you see, and is from the chapel of St. Solange."

"But where are you going so late, uncle?" said the Miller. Do you reckon upon sleeping at home, to-night? That is a long way from here."

"Oh, no! I am on my road to Blanchemont, to be ready for the *fête* to-morrow."

"Ah, to be sure, it will be a good day for you. You will at least collect forty great sous."

"No, but perhaps I may get enough to say a mass to the good saint of the village."

"You still like these masses, then?"

"The mass and the brandy, nephew, with a little tobacco, are the salvation both of the soul and the body."

"I will say no more, but that the brandy does not warm you enough to allow you to sleep in ditches at your age, uncle."

"People must sleep where they can, nephew. When they are tired they stop. They take a nap upon a stone or a wallet, when it is not too flat."

"But it is my opinion that yours is round enough to-night."

"Yes, nephew, you ought to let me put it upon your horse, for I am a little tired."

"No, I cannot do that, because Sophia is sufficiently loaded already; but give it to me, and I will carry it as far as Blanchemont."

"That is right. You are young, and you ought to make yourself useful to your uncle. Stay, let me see. Is your blouse clean?" added he, with an air of disgust.

"Oh, this is only the flour," replied the Miller, taking the mendicant's wallet; "that does not war with bread. A thousand thunders! What a load of old crusts you have got!"

"Old crusts! I never take them. If any one were to think of making me such an offer, I should very likely throw them in his face, as I once did to Madame Bricolin."

"And it is ever since that day that she has been afraid of you."

"Yes, she says that I shall, perhaps, set the barn on fire," said the beggar, with a sinister air

And then he added in a whining tone—

"Poor dear woman! as if I could be so wicked. What harm have I ever done to anybody?"

"To nobody that I know," replied the Miller; "if you had, you would not be where you are."

"Never, never have I done any injury to any one!" replied uncle Cadoche, lifting up his hands to heaven, "which may be proved by my never having been brought to justice for anything that I have done. Have I ever spent a single day in prison in all my life? I have always served my Master, and he has always protected me during the forty years in which I have been looking for my poor living."

"Uncle, how old now may you really be?"

"I don't know, my child, for my certificate of baptism has got mislaid, like those of so many other people. I ought to be above eighty. I am ten years older than Father Bricolin, who appears to be, however, that much the elder."

"Truly you carry your age better than he does, but his has been one of those accidents which do not happen to all the world."

"Yes," said the beggar, with a deep sigh of compunction, "he has had his trials."

"Was this a history of your own times? Are you not from the same part of the country?"

"Yes, I am a native of Ruffec, near Beaufort, where the accident happened."

"And you were there at the time?"

"Oh yes, I believe I was; good and holy Virgin! I cannot think of it without trembling. Had they not cause for fear in those days?"

"How can you talk of being afraid, you who are alone on these roads at every hour?"

"Oh, now, my son, what should a poor man like me have to fear, who has only got a few rags to cover himself with? But in those days I had a little store, which those thieves were the cause of my losing."

"What! did those *chauffeurs* come to you, too?"

"Ah, no, indeed, I never had enough to tempt them; but I had a little house which I let to labouring people, and when the fear of thieves spread through the country, nobody would live in it. I was never able to sell it, and neither had I the means of repairing it, so it fell into ruins; and then, too, I had debts which I was not able to pay; so then my field, my house, and a pretty little hemp-field that I had, were all sold in execution; and then I was forced to take my wallet, and leave the country, and since that time I have always been wandering about like a child of Providence."

"But you do not often leave this neighbourhood?"

"Oh, no! I am known here, and all my patrons and my family are here."

"I thought you had only yourself?"

"And all my nephews—you forget them."

"That is true, I forgot. There is myself, for example, my comrade here, and all those who never refuse you a sou to buy your tobacco. But tell me then, uncle, these *chauffeurs* that you talk about, what people were they?"

"Ask Heaven, my son, for nothing less can tell you."

"It is said that there were rich people among them, who passed for men of consideration."

"They say that there are some of them yet living, who are great and well-fed, who have good lands, and fields, and good houses, who make a figure in the country, and who will not give even two farthings to a poor creature. Ah! if these people had been like me, they would all have been hung."

"That is true, father Cadoche."

"Everybody was suspected in those days, but still I have had the happiness of never being accused, though justice searched the closest among the poor. They threw those who were as pure as snow into prison, and when they had their hands on the really guilty, there came orders from head-quarters to release them."

"And why was that?"

"Oh, for no other reason than because they were rich.

Have you ever seen the time, nephew, when deference was not paid to money?"

"Yes, that is true enough. Come, uncle, you see we shall be at Blanchemont directly; where would you like us to carry your bread-bag?"

"Give it to me, nephew. I shall go and sleep in the priest's stables. He is a good man, and never turns me away from his door. He is like you, Grand-Louis, for you never gave me an unkind look; and you shall have your recompense; you shall be my heir, as I have always promised you. You shall have everything except the *bouquet*, which I must give to little Borgnotte; my house, my dresses, my wallet, and my hog—all shall be yours."

"That's right! that's right!" said the Miller. "I see very plainly that I shall be too rich at last, and that all the girls will want to marry me."

"I admire your kindness of heart, Grand-Louis," said Lemor, when the beggar had disappeared behind the hedge of the enclosure, which he cut through in a right line without disturbing himself about fences or looking for pathways; "you treat this mendicant as if he really were your uncle."

"Why not, since it is so great a pleasure to him to be made the rich relation, and to promise his possessions to everybody? A fine inheritance, truly! His mud hut, where he sleeps with his hog, neither more nor less than like Saint Anthony, and all the rest of his rubbish, which makes one heart-sick! If I can offer nothing more to M. Bricolin to induce his acceptance, my affairs are in mighty good train."

"Yet notwithstanding the distaste which this man must personally inspire, you still took his wallet upon your shoulder, and carried it to relieve him. Louis, you have a true evangelical spirit."

"What a wonderful thing! Yet who would refuse such a trifling service to a poor fellow who is obliged to beg his bread at fourscore years? He is a fine fellow, after all! Everybody must be interested for him, because he is so honest, though a little too bigoted, and scarcely strict enough in his conduct."

"That is the impression he has made on me."

"Bah! What virtue can you expect people of his trade to possess? It is a great thing for them not to have gross vices, or fall into great crimes. Yet, notwithstanding all his disadvantages, he reasons with good sense."

"I was struck with the latter. But why does he consider himself the uncle of all the world? Is it one of the grains of his folly?"

"Oh, no! he does not mean it in earnest; it is only a kind of title which he has assumed. Many of this sort of people affect some mania to make themselves attractive, and to induce those to bestow their alms who would give them nothing either for prudence or charity's sake. It is, unfortunately, a custom among us, for the poor to assume the character of

buffoons at the door of the rich. But you see we have reached Blanchemont farm, comrade. Stay! believe me, you must not go in. I am not afraid that you would not be master of yourself, but *she*, who is not forewarned, might utter some exclamation, or drop some word—at least let me go in first, and put her on her guard."

"But everybody is still up in the village, and the presence of a person whom nobody knows might be noticed, if I were to stay here until you returned."

"Well, then, you must do me the favour to go into the warren: at this hour, nobody walks there. Sit down quickly in a corner, and as I return, I will whistle as if I were calling a dog, begging your pardon, and you can come and join me."

Lemor resigned himself, hoping that the ingenious Miller would find some means of bringing Marcelle to his side. He therefore slowly followed the covered footpath which crossed the warren, stopping every moment to listen, holding his breath, and restraining his footsteps, that he might be nearer at hand for that happy meeting.

It was not long before he heard light footsteps passing over the grassy turf, and the rustling of the leaves convinced him that some person was approaching. He entered into the thicket to assure himself that he was not mistaken, and saw a diminutive female form approaching him. We easily believe what we desire, and Henry, not entertaining a doubt that it was Marcelle, sent to him by the Miller, hastened to meet the phantom. But he stopped abruptly on hearing a voice which he did not know, calling, with great precaution—"*Paul! Paul! are you there, Paul?*"

Henry, finding that he was mistaken, and thinking that he had intruded on a meeting intended for another, would have retreated; but he made some noise in walking over the withered branches, which catching the lunatic's attention in the midst of her dream of love, she darted after him with the rapidity of an arrow, crying in a lamentable voice, "Paul! Paul! I am here! Paul, it is I! Do not go, Paul! Paul, you always fly me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LUNATIC.

Lemor did not, at first, very much disturb himself at this new adventure. He thought that, favoured by the darkness of the night, it would be very easy for him to avoid the woman, whom he had not sufficiently distinguished to suspect her insanity. He naturally flattered himself that he would run with the greater speed of the two, but he very quickly discovered his mistake, and that it required an exertion of the greatest agility of which he was capable to preserve some distance between them. Compelled to traverse the whole extent of the warren, he very soon found himself at the bottom of the avenue in which Bricoline was accustomed to pace backwards and forwards for hours together, and where the grass was trodden down in a long track under her footsteps. The fugitive, who up to this time had found his speed retarded by the roots of flowering shrubs, and the ruggedness of his way, now exerted his utmost energy to gain ground. The lunatic, however, who, when under the influence of an impassioned impulse, became light as a withered leaf borne by the storm, followed him so rapidly, that Lémor, confounded with surprise, and extremely anxious not to be seen near enough to be afterwards recognised, plunged afresh into the underwood, and sought to bury himself in the deep shade; but the idiot knew every tree, every bush, and, it might almost be said, every branch on tree and bush in the whole warren. During the dozen years in which she had thus passed her life, there was not a nook or corner into which her body had not formed the habit of mechanically penetrating, even though the state of her mind prevented her from deducing reasonable observations from what she saw; and, above all, the excitement of her delirium rendered her completely insensible to bodily pain and inconvenience. She left on the briers of the wood fragments of her torn flesh even without perceiving it, an obtuseness of physical perception arising from her cataleptic malady, which gave her an unequivocal advantage over the fugitive she was straining every nerve to overtake. She was, besides, so thin, her attenuated body occupied so small a space, that she glided like a lizard between the close and crowded trunks of trees where Lémor was compelled to force a passage with effort, and more frequently still, where he was compelled to turn and pursue another course.

Finding himself more embarrassed than before, he betook himself again to the avenue which skirted the field, still closely

pursued, and decided upon leaping the ditch without having first computed its real width, not having taken into account the tufted underwood which had overgrown its opening, and apparently narrowed its breadth. Taking his leap, he fell upon his knees among the brambles, but scarcely had he had time to rise before the phantom, crossing this obstacle without jumping over it or touching the stones or nettles, was on the same side with him, clinging to his garments. Lémor, whose imagination was as excitable as that of a painter or a poet, believed himself under the influence of a dream, and debated with himself whether or not he had been seized with the nightmare; but having succeeded in disengaging himself from the hold of the lunatic, she continued to pursue him, uttering inarticulate cries, while he resumed his course across the fields.

But she darted upon his track, as agile in the furrows of the stubble, where the straw had been all freshly cut and stood up sharp, bristling, and wounding, as she had been among the underwood of the park. At the end of the field, Lémor leaped over a newly-erected fence, and found himself in a covered way of steep descent. He had not taken ten steps before he heard the spectre behind him, following him with her unceasing cry, in a half-stifled voice, "Paul, Paul! why do you fly me!"

This race had something in it so fantastic that it excited more and more the imagination of Lémor. He had been able, in disengaging himself from the hold of the maniac, vaguely to distinguish, by the clear starlight night, that strange apparition, that cadaverous face, those thin, emaciated arms covered with wounds, those long black locks floating over her blood-stained tatters. It had not entered into his thoughts that the intellect of this unhappy creature was disordered: he only believed himself followed by an impassioned woman, whose mind was infuriated with jealousy; insane for the moment, since she obstinately persisted in taking him for another. He hesitated whether he should stop and speak, and so rectify her mistake, but how then explain his presence in the warren? To be found gliding about in the darkness, like a thief, would it not, at the very outset of his introduction, awaken strange suspicions at the farm, and ought he not, above everything, avoid marking his first appearance in the country by an adventure that must be considered either as scandalous or ridiculous?

These considerations decided him still to continue the race; and this strange exercise continued for half-an-hour without interruption. The brain of Lémor became inflamed in spite of himself, and for some moments he felt as if he were going mad in witnessing the inconceivable obstinacy and supernatural rapidity of the phantom so determined in her pursuit. He could compare all this to nothing but to the histories which are related of the Will-o'-the-Wisp and malevolent fairies of the night.

At last Lémor found the Vauvre at the bottom of the little valley, and, though bathed with perspiration, was on the point of throwing himself into the stream, calculating that with that

barrier placed between himself and the spectre, he should at last find a deliverance, when he heard behind him an agonizing and horrible shriek, which sent a sudden coldness through his whole frame. He turned, but saw nothing: the lunatic had disappeared.

The first idea of Lemor was to profit by that which might prove to be but the respite of a moment to withdraw to a greater distance, so that the traces of his way might be entirely lost; but that fearful cry had left on him an impression too painful. Was all well with that woman from whom it had proceeded? That sound had scarcely seemed to have anything human in its cadence, and yet what intense sorrow, what profound despair it seemed to express. "She might have fallen in pursuing him, and sustaine dsome grievous bodily injury," thought Lemor; "or rather, in losing sight of me behind these old willow-trees, has she believed that I have drowned myself? Was that a cry of agony or terror? or was it the shriek of rage at not being able to follow me into the water, into which she supposes that I have thrown myself. But, supposing that she herself had fallen into some ditch, or down some precipice, which I may not have seen in my hasty flight? If this unlucky meeting should have terminated the life of an unhappy being? No! whatever may be the result, it is impossible for me to abandon her to the horrors of a death of lonely agony!"

Lemor retraced his steps, and anxiously searched for the unknown, but without success. The steep pathway which he had traversed extended to the extremity of the warren, the boundary of which was formed by an enclosure of high bushes, but no ditch; neither was there pond nor well, in which she might have drowned herself. The sandy road bore not, as far as Lemor could distinguish, the sign of any one's having fallen, or the traces of any disaster. He continued his search, bewildering his own mind with conjectures, when he heard a whistle many times repeated, as though it were the recalling of a dog. At first he gave the sound but little attention, so much was he agitated and preoccupied by his adventure; but at last he remembered that this was the signal which had been agreed upon between himself and the Miller, and despairing of finding her whom he was pursuing, he answered by another whistle to the summons of Grand-Louis.

"And pray why," said the Miller, when they had rejoined each other in the warren, "did you take your walk so far, when I had recommended you not even to stir? Here have I been looking for you in the wood for the last quarter of an hour, not daring to call you too loudly, and losing all patience the while. But how is this? What have you been doing, all panting and out of breath, and with your dress disordered? Faith my blouse has passed into bad quarters upon your shoulders to be in the state which I see! But tell me what has happened, for you look like a rabbit struck by some bird of prey; or rather, you have the look of a man pursued by an evil spirit."

"You have guessed aright, my friend. Either what Johnny related of the nocturnal hobgoblin of the Black Valley has some inexplicable truth at the bottom, or else I myself am labouring under some hallucination of mind; but for the last hour, I believe (it may be an age for aught I know) I have been disputing with Satan himself."

"If you were not so obstinate in drinking nothing but pure water to your meals," replied the miller; "I should have thought you were just in a suitable condition to meet *la Grande Bête*, the white hound, or *Georgeon* the wolf-driver. But you are too wise and too reasonable to believe such tales, and so something must certainly have happened to you. Perhaps you have met with a mad dog?"

"Worse than that," replied Lemor, resuming his spirits little by little; "it was a mad woman, my friend. A sorceress who ran quicker than I could do, and who has disappeared, I know not how, just at the moment when I was going to throw myself into the water, to relieve myself from her presence."

"A woman! oh! oh!—and what did she say?"

"She took me for a certain Paul to whom she was strongly attached, at least so it appeared to me."

"I guessed it was that. You have seen the maniac of the château I must have been stupid not to have forewarned you that you might meet her here. We are so accustomed to see her running the night through, like an old weasel, that we never give the matter the least attention, and yet when we think about it, it is a misfortune to have a broken heart. But what in the world could make her run after you? she is accustomed to shun every one that she sees coming towards her. Her malady must have greater mastery over her lately, though her affliction was great enough before, poor girl!"

"Who, then, is this unfortunate creature?"

"You can hear all about that some other time. Double your pace, if you please. You look as if you were worn out with fatigue."

"I believe that I have broken both my knees in falling."

"And yet there is *somebody* at the end of this path impatiently waiting for you," said the Miller, modulating his voice still lower than before.

"Oh!" exclaimed Lemor, "I feel myself lighter than the night-wind."

And he quickened his pace into a run.

"Softly!" said the Miller, holding him back. "Run only on the grass. Let not a footfall be heard. She is yonder under that great tree. Do not quit that spot. I shall take a round to guard you against surprise."

"Danger then threatens her for coming hither?" said Lemor in alarm.

"Had I thought so, I should rather have hindered than helped her coming. Everybody in the new château is occupied

preparing for the *fête* of to-morrow. But then I may be useful in misleading the lunatic, if she should take the fancy into her head of returning to torment you."

Henry, absorbed in his happiness, forgot everything else, and flew to precipitate himself at the feet of Marcelle, who awaited him under a clump of oaks in a spot the least frequented in the wood.

Explanations found little place in the first impassioned joy of that meeting. Pure and reserved as their intercourse had ever been, they now experienced a species of intoxication which rather belonged to their humanity than their will. They were as if stupefied at finding themselves meeting thus soon after having almost believed that their separation was an eternal one; and now they sought not to make each other comprehend what had passed within them, to bring them so quickly to retract all their courageous projects of self-sacrifice. They could well mutually guess what painful sufferings, and what power of irresistible attraction had compelled them to rush the one towards the other, at the very moment when they had sworn to separate.

"Unfeeling! and would you leave me for ever?" said Marcelle, at the same time abandoning her hand to Lémor.

"Cruel! and would you banish me for a year?" pressing that hand to his lips.

And Marcelle perfectly comprehended that her resolution courageously to remain a year apart had been more sincere in its intention than the eternal exile to which Lémor had endeavoured to condemn himself.

So when they were able to speak, an effort of which they were not capable until after a long interval of tongue-tied delight, Marcelle was the first to return to this truly laudable design.

"Lémor," said she, "this is but a ray of the sun darting between two clouds. We must obey the law of duty. When even in this instance, we find so many obstacles to affect even the security of our conversation, there would certainly be something profoundly irreligious in our uniting so quickly, and we must meet this hour for the last time until the expiration of my mourning. Only tell me that you love me, and that I shall be your wife, and I shall be endowed with the necessary strength to wait the allotted period."

"Do not speak to me of separation now!" exclaimed Lémor, with impetuosity. "Oh, leave me the enjoyment of this moment, the most extatic of my life! Suffer me to forget that which was yesterday, and that which shall be to-morrow. See you not that this night is as soft as this heaven is beautiful? This very place is tranquil and embalmed. You are here! This is even yourself, Marcelle, and not your shadow. We are here together; we have found each other again by an unpremeditated chance. Heaven has willed it, and we have been so happy to obey, *both of us.* You also,

Marcelle, even as much as myself? Is it possible! No, I dream not! You are here, near me, with me alone! what happiness! We who love each other so much! We have not the power to part; no, we can never! we can never more be divided!"

"And yet, my friend ——"

"I know, I know what you would say. To-morrow—another day, you will write me, and tell me your determination, I shall obey; you well know that. Why should we speak of it to-night? Why spoil this moment which has not had its equal through my whole existence? Leave me to persuade myself that it will never end. Marcelle, I see you, I can see you clearly notwithstanding the night, your charms are enhanced within these three days—even since this morning when you were already so beautiful. Oh, tell me that your hand shall never more be withdrawn from mine! I hold it so firmly in my own."

"Ah! you are right, Lémor. Let us enjoy the happiness of being restored to each other, and banish from our minds the thought of separation—to-morrow—another day."

"Yes, leave it till another day, another day!" exclaimed Henry.

"Do me the favour to speak a little lower," said the Miller, approaching them. "In spite of myself, I hear every word that you say, M. Henry."

The two lovers remained almost for an hour plunged in a pure ecstacy, indulging in the sweetest dreams of the future, and speaking of their happiness, as it were, instead of being interrupted, really to begin upon the morrow. The balmy breeze scattered over them the perfumes of the night, and the placid stars passed over their heads without making them perceive the inevitable flight of time, which never pauses excepting in the hearts of happy lovers.

But the Miller, after having given far more than one sign of impatience, came positively to break up their interview, when the polar star indicated to him ten o'clock by the celestial dial.

"My friends," said he, "it is impossible for me to leave you here, and equally impossible for you to stop an instant longer. I hear no more the song of the cowherds in the court of the farm, and the lights are all extinguished in the windows of the new château. There is not another burning excepting that in the chamber of Mademoiselle Rose, and she is only waiting for Madame Marcelle to go to bed. M. Bricolin is coming this way, making his round with his dogs, as he always does on the eve of holidays, so pray say good-bye as quickly as possible."

Lémor exclaimed against this, saying, "We have only just met!"

"That may be," said the Miller; "but do you know, that for my part I have to take a journey to Châtre to-night."

"How? and on my account?" exclaimed Marcelle.

"If you please. I must see your attorney before he goes to bed, as I am not anxious to go to him by daylight to-morrow, to make M. Bricolin believe that I am conspiring against him."

"But, Grand-Louis," said Marcelle, "I cannot wish you to run that risk for me."

"Enough, enough! say no more," replied the Miller, "I must act as I please myself. But stay! I hear those brown dogs barking. Return into the field, Madame Marcelle, and we, my Parisian, must take the high-road. Let us be off!"

The lovers separated without uttering another word They were fearful of having to look back upon that interview as their last. Marcelle felt herself unequal to the task of fixing a day for the departure of Henry, and he, fearing that she would determine upon one, hastened to withdraw, after having kissed her hand some ten times in silence.

"Ah, well! and what have you decided upon?" inquired the Miller when they had gained the skirts of the park.

"On nothing, my friend," said Lemor; "we have spoken of nothing but our happiness."

"Of your future happiness! But what of the present?"

"There is no present and no future. Both present and future are the same to those who love!"

"Here now you are only beating about the bushes. I hope, however, that you will keep yourself quiet, and not run about all night in the woods distracted with these mortal pangs. Come, my boy, you see you are in the right road. You know your way back to Angibault alone?"

"Perfectly. But why will you not let me accompany you to the town where you are going?"

"No, it is too far. One of us being on foot would only hinder the other, at least unless we are both to mount Sophia at once according to our country fashion; but the poor beast is too old for that, and besides, she has not yet had her supper. I must go and look for the tree to which I tied her, after having pretended to retake my way to the mill. Do you know that it gave me some anxiety to leave poor Sophia to the care of Providence. I took care to hide her well among the branches. But if some vagabond—for there are a great many of that sort come to the fête-day—should have discovered her and got her away! While you have been billing and cooing, perhaps Sophia may have trotted off."

"Come, let us go and look for her together."

"No, no! You are rather too ready to bend your steps again towards the château; I can see that very well. Return home, and tell my mother to go to bed without thinking about me. Perhaps it may be rather late before I am back. M. Tailland, the attorney, will very likely make me stop for supper. He is a *bon vivant*, rather a *gourmand*, but an amiable man. That will give me time to talk about the Blanchemont affairs, and Sophia may eat her peck of oats without desiring to be admitted into the consultation."

Lemor did not insist upon accompanying his friend. Although the good Miller had inspired him both with gratitude and affection, he preferred being alone after the emotions of the night. He felt under a necessity of devoting all his thoughts to Marcelle without distraction or division, and to renew and retrace all those sweet dreams he had experienced at her feet. He retraced his steps, therefore, to Angibault, almost in the same manner that a somnambulist finds his way back to his bed. I am ignorant whether he took the right road; whether he crossed the river over the bridge; whether he doubled the distance of his journey; whether he did not many times forget himself on the borders of the fountains. The night was rich and voluptuous; and from the cock, which woke with its cheering voice the cottage echoes, to the cricket which whispered so mysteriously among the cottage herbage, all appeared to repeat in answer to each other, in triumph as well as secresy, the cherished name of Marcelle.

But, on arriving at the mill, he felt himself overcome with fatigue; and, after having warned the mother of the miller not to wait for her son, he went and threw himself upon the little bed which Louis had arranged for him in his own chamber. Grand'-Marie, having strongly urged upon Johnny not to keep his master waiting too long, while he rose, as he would want him to put Sophia in the stable, went to rest also. But maternal tenderness sleeps only with one eye; and the storm having risen, the good woman started from her pillow at every peal of thunder that rolled over the valley, believing that she heard her son knocking for Johnny, who slept at the mill. When daylight appeared, she rose with caution, and went to request him not to make too much noise, because Grand-Louis, having no doubt returned very late, must need a little longer sleep than usual. She was, therefore, very much surprised, and almost alarmed, when Johnny replied that his master had not yet returned.

"It is not possible!" she exclaimed. "He never sleeps away from home when he only goes to Blanchemont."

"Bah! mistress; it is the eve of the fête. Nobody thinks of sleeping down there. The *cabarets* are open all night. The bagpipers come and play all their most beautiful marches. That carries the heart into the dance at once. They all want to be ready for the next day. They never dream of going to bed, for fear of awaking too late, and losing ever so little of the amusement. Our master is only amusing himself, and turning night into day."

"Your master never passes his nights in a *cabaret*," replied the miller's mother, shaking her head. After having opened the stable door, to see if Sophia were in her stall, "I thought," added she, "that he might have come in without wishing to awake you, Johnny. That is a pain to him. He would rather wait upon himself than disturb a child like you, who sleeps so soundly. But, for his own part, he has never lain down, and

he was very much fatigued; besides, the day before he had been a long way. It was very late before he went to bed last night, and to-night he has not been in bed at all."

The Miller's mother went to make her toilet in its Sunday fashion. "This wretched love!" thought she; "this is what torments him, and keeps him wandering about both day and night. What end will there be to it all?"

CHAPTER XXV.

SOPHIA.

GRAND'MARIE, plunged in sorrowful reflections, according to the custom of many elderly people, expressed her feelings aloud as she went from her drawers to her table, mechanically occupying herself in preparing her antiquated bodice with its long skirts, and her apron of *indienne* which she had guarded so carefully from her very youth, and which she valued so highly because it had cost at that time four times as much as the most beautiful stuff would be charged in our own day.

"Don't vex yourself, mother," said Grand-Louis, who was listening at the threshold of the door, which he had reached without her perceiving him; "all this will end as it may, but your son will never give up the hope of making you happy."

"Ah! my poor boy, I did not see you," said his mother, a little ashamed, even at her age, at being surprised by her son with her long grey hair floating over her shoulders; for the peasants of the Black Valley of her time, manifest an extreme repugnance to show their heads uncovered. But Grand' Marie very soon forgot this emotion of superannuated modesty on seeing the Miller's pallid and disordered aspect.

"Ah!" she energetically exclaimed, clasping her hands together, "how tired you look! Anybody would think that you had been out in all the rain of the night. Yes, indeed, you are wet through. Go quickly and take off these things. How!—could you not find a single house where you might have taken shelter? How harassed you look this morning! Ah! my poor boy, people might say that you wish to make yourself ill."

"Oh, no, mother; don't make yourself uneasy about that," replied the Miller, compelling himself to assume his habitual air of gaiety. "I have passed the night under shelter with my friends—people with whom I had business, and who would insist on my having a good supper. I only got a little wet in returning home on foot."

"On foot! And what, then, have you done with Sophia?"

"I have lent her to—— what do you call him?—down there."

"Whom do you mean by 'what do you call him, down there?'"

"You know very well. Bah! I will tell you all that by-and-by. If you want to go to church, I will take the little black mare, and you shall ride behind."

"But you were wrong to lend Sophia, child. That animal has no equal, and she deserves to be spared. I should have liked it a great deal better if you had lent both the others."

"So should I too. But what would you have? It is as it is. Come, mother, I shall go and dress, and when you are ready you must call me."

"No, no. I see very well that you have not *tasted sleep* this night, and I wish you to go and have a nap. There is still time enough between this and the time for mass. Ah! Grand-Louis, how wretched you look! how wretched you look! Nothing ought to have made you wander about as you have been doing."

"Be easy, mother! I don't feel ill, and this does not often happen. It is a good thing to shake off one's own thoughts sometimes."

And the Miller, still more grieved than before at having excited the uneasiness of his mother, who never expressed her dissatisfaction saving with extreme gentleness and discretion, went and threw himself upon his bed so suddenly as to awake Lemor.

"Are you getting up already?" said the latter, rubbing his eyes.

"No, no; but with your permission I am coming to bed," replied the Miller, tossing up his bed as he spoke.

"My friend, you have had some vexation," replied Lémor, roused at once by the unequivocal signs of rage, manifested by Grand-Louis.

"Vexation! Yes, sir, I believe I have, and perhaps more than the thing is worth; but if I feel more troubled than I wish, I don't know how to help it."

And the big tears swam in the drowsy eyes of the Miller.

"My friend," exclaimed Lémor, leaping from his bed and dressing in haste, "I see plainly that some misfortune has happened to you to-night, while I was sleeping in peace. Ah! what can I do? Where ought I to go?"

"Nowhere, for it is quite useless," said Grand-Louis, shrugging his shoulders, as though he were ashamed of his weakness. "I have run about enough this night for nothing—for a beast, after all! But what then? people attach themselves to animals as they do to human beings, and it is just as possible to regret an old horse as an old friend. You and the people who live in the town can't understand that; but we, good country-people—we live with our animals, from whom we differ so little."

"And you have lost Sophia, I understand?"

"Lost—yes: that is to say, she has been stolen from me."

"Perhaps last night in the warren?"

"Exactly so. You remember that I had a misgiving. When you left me, I returned to the place where I had hid her so carefully, and where the poor beast, who is as patient as a lamb, could never have got loose. In all her life she never broke bridle or halter. Ah! well, sir—horse and bridle, all have disappeared! I have searched in every place, and run everywhere, but have discovered not a single trace. There was one place, however, that I dared not inquire at, and that was the farm; for what would they have thought? They would have wanted to know how, after I had once mounted my beast, I could have lost her on the road. They would have believed that I was intoxicated; and Madame Bricolin would not have failed to have reported to Mademoiselle Rose that I had been engaged in some disgraceful adventure, unworthy of a man who thought of her only in all the world. I imagined at first that somebody had only wished to play me a roguish trick; so I went into every house to make inquiries, for almost all the town were still up. I pried first into one house, and then into another, without appearing to mean anything; I got into every stable, and even into that of the château, without being perceived, but no Sophia. Blanchemont is at this present time full of people of all sorts; and certainly some cheating rogue has been among the number, who having come on foot has returned on horseback, saying that the fête was enough for him before it began, and that he had no occasion to stay and see anything further. Come—there is no use in thinking any more about it. Fortunately I did not lose my senses in the midst of all this. I went on foot to Chatre easily enough, and I saw my notary: it was rather late and he had finished his supper, and the state of his digestion made him a little deaf, but he will be at the fête by-and-by as he promised me. After leaving him I searched all over again, and beat the bushes like a night fowler. I explored every corner, through all the rain and the thunder, until daylight came, hoping every moment to discover the thief hid somewhere or another, but all in vain. And I must not trumpet this mischance abroad, since it might give rise to scandal; and if people began to search into the matter, we should look rather foolish with this tale of a horse hid in the warren, and left to herself for an hour, without my being able to explain how or why. I had taken her to some distance from the place of your meeting, in order that, if she began to move, she might not attract attention to you. Poor Sophia! I ought to have had more confidence in her good sense. She would not have stirred."

"And so I am the cause of this misfortune! Grand-Louis, I am more distressed than you, and you must certainly permit me to indemnify you for this loss as much as may be possible."

"You must not say that, sir! I despise the trifle of money at which the old beast might have been valued at the fair. Do you think I should be so anxious about a hundred francs? Oh, no! what I regret is herself, and not her value in money; she was of no value to anybody but me. She was so courageous, so sensible, and she knew me so well! I am sure she is thinking about me this very moment, and looks askance at the person that takes care of her—provided, at least, that she is taken care of. If I were sure of that I should be almost consoled. But she will be groomed with blows from a whip handle, and fed with the husks of chestnuts. It must certainly be some sharper from La Marche who will take her up into the mountains to feed in a field of stones, instead of those pretty little pastures on the borders of the river, where she lived so happily, and where she gambolled with the young colts; so playful and frisky did she feel at the sight of the green meadows. But my mother will regret her the most, and I shall never be at liberty to explain to her how this misfortune happened. I have not yet had the courage to tell her of our loss: so do not speak to her about it until I have contrived some tale to make the news less bitter."

There was, in the simple regret of the Miller, something ludicrous and at the same time touching; and Lemor, distressed at being the cause of his vexation, was so much affected, that the kind-hearted Louis was himself obliged to endeavour to console him.

"Come, come," said he, "we have had enough of foolery about a four-footed creature. I know very well that it was no fault of yours, and I never for a moment thought of reproaching you. Don't let this spoil the remembrance of your happiness, friend; it is but a trifle, indeed, compared with the value of the delightful night which you were spending at the same time. If I once had an appointment with Rose myself, I should be quite willing to ride on a broom-stick all the rest of my life. You must not say a word about this to Madame Marcelle. She would be not at all unlikely to send me a horse worth a thousand francs, and that would only give me pain. I will never attach myself to another animal again. There is quite enough anxiety in life arising from being attached to our fellow-creatures. I tell you to think about your love affair, and make yourself very fine, but still only in a peasant's fashion, and go to the *fête*, for it is better that you should accustom yourself to be a little known about the country. That will be more prudent than hiding yourself, which must excite suspicion at once. You will see Madame Marcelle, but you must not speak to her. Besides, you would have no opportunity, for she does not dance; she is in her first deep mourning. But Rose is not; and I reckon upon dancing with her till night, now that her dear papa has given us permission. That reminds me that I must sleep for a couple of hours, that I may not look as if I had just been dug out

of my grave. Do not vex yourself any more, and in five minutes you will hear me snore."

The Miller kept his word; and, when about ten o'clock, they brought up his black mare, much more beautiful but less beloved than Sophia, when dressed in his Sunday vest of fine cloth, with his toilet well made, his eye bright, and his complexion clear, he took his seat firmly in his saddle. Grand' Marie, mounting behind him by the help of a chair and the arm of Lémor, experienced an emotion of pride at being the mother of the handsome Miller.

The inmates of the farm had slept little better than those of the mill, and we feel ourselves obliged to retrace our steps a little, to put our readers in possession of the events which had passed during the night that preceded the *fête*.

Lémor, divided between the painful agitation which his strange meeting with the maniac had caused him, and the intoxicating joy of seeing Marcelle again, had not remarked in the warren that the Miller was very little calmer than himself. Grand-Louis had found the farm-yard full of bustle and tumult. Two *pataches* and three cabriolets, which had brought within their solid sides all the relations of the Bricolins, rested upon their worn-out frames along the stables and the dunghills. All the poor neighbours that were anxious to earn a slender pittance, had been put in requisition to help to prepare the supper of the guests, more numerous and more voracious than had been expected at the new château M. Bricolin, more vain at the display of his wealth than annoyed at the expense, was in the best of tempers. His daughters, his sons, his cousins, his nephews, and his sons-in-law, came in turns, and asked him whisperingly what day they should formally occupy the old château, newly painted and plastered, and with the cipher of the Bricolins instead of the escutcheon of the Blanchemont family over the door. "For at last you will be the lord and master of Blanchemont," was the general burden of the song; "and we know that you will make a great deal better use of your fortune than all the counts and barons to whom you have succeeded, to the great glory of the new aristocracy, and the nobility of good crown-pieces." Bricolin was thus intoxicated with pride, and, while with a mischievous smile answering his dear relations, "Not yet, not yet; perhaps never!" he assumed with delight all the importance of a sovereign lord. He no longer thought of the expenditure, but gave orders to his servants, to his mother, to his daughter, and his wife, in a thundering voice, inflated with his own great dignity. The whole house was turned upside down; the Grandmother Bricolin was employed in pulling the feathers from the fowls, scarcely yet dead, by the dozen; and Madame Bricolin, who had been at first in a murderous humour while superintending the tumult of her kitchen, began also to be cheerfully excited in her turn, on seeing the plentiful repast, the apartments so finely prepared, and the guests

in an ecstasy of admiration. Under the cover of all this disorder the Miller had found it an easy thing to speak to Marcelle, and she, excusing herself on account of a headache, had withdrawn from the supper, and had spent the time with Lémor in the warren.

Rose herself, while the table was being spread, found more than one excellent pretence for wandering out into the court, and for saying a few friendly words to Grand-Louis, according to her usual custom. But her mother, who rarely lost sight of her, had devised a plan of her own to send the Miller away. Compelled to submit to the orders of her husband, who had imperatively enjoined her not to show any rudeness to him, she had invented a plan to satisfy her hatred, and to make Rose ashamed of her friendship for him, by making him an object of ridicule with her other daughters and their relations, who were all, both old and young, sufficiently insolent and malicious. She rapidly confided to them all, entrusting the secret to each individual in particular, that this village wit flattered himself that he would succeed in pleasing her daughter, but that Rose knew nothing about it, and did not think it worthy of the slightest attention: that M. Bricolin would not believe it, and consequently treated him with too much good-nature, but that she had had information of a curious fact, from very good authority—and this was, that the handsome Miller, the favourite of all the girls of light conduct in the country, had several times boasted that he could please the richest lady that he should choose to make love to, and one as easily as another. And, moreover, Madame Bricolin went so far as to name some of the persons present, laughing significantly with a bitter and contemptuous manner, turning up her apron, and placing her hand on her side.

On the feminine side of the family, Madame Bricolin's confidential communications were promptly passed from mouth to ear, to all the assembled Bricolins of the other sex, to so annoying a degree that Grand-Louis, who had no other thought but that of rejoining Lemor, found himself quickly assailed by epigrams so stupid as to be incomprehensible, and his retreat was accompanied by bursts of ill-stifled laughter, and whisperings of the most extreme impertinence. Not being able to understand the merriment which he excited, he left the farm anxious, disgusted, and full of contempt for the coarse wit displayed by the bourgeois gentlemen of the country, that night assembled at Blanchemont.

Following Madame Bricolin's instructions, they were particularly careful that M. Bricolin should not discover their conspiracy, and they all faithfully promised to persecute the Miller on the following day, in the presence of Rose. It was necessary, her mother said, that her lover should be humiliated in her eyes, in order that she might not be induced to listen to him from the kindness of her own heart, and that she might be accustomed to keep the peasants at a distance.

After supper they made the fiddlers come, and the company began to dance in the courtyard, in anticipation of the festivities of the morrow. Then came an interval of repose, during which the Miller, anxious in mind and pressed for time to pay his promised visit to Châtre, and persuaded that the night's pleasure was closed at the new château, had compelled the two lovers to separate much sooner than they wished.

When Marcelle returned to the farm, she found that the company had resumed their diversions; and, feeling the same need of solitude and contemplation which had induced Lemor. to wander in the paths of the Black Valley, she returned into the warren, and walked slowly backwards and forwards there till midnight. The sound of the bagpipe, joined to that of the *vielle*, jarred a little on the ear when close at hand; but in the distance, that rude tone which sometimes caught so true a cadence, became invested with a greater originality, from the species of barbarous harmony which marked its accompaniment, and seemed to possess a charm which penetrated the simple souls who listened to its outpourings, and particularly the heart which had been lulled to sleep by it in the happy days of childhood. The powerful vibration of the instrument, harsh and nasal, served to balance the shrill tones and the nervous *staccato* of the vielle, and the two varieties of sound mutually corrected each other. Marcelle listened to the harmony of these mingled sounds with pleasure, and observing that the more distant she was from them the greater was their charm, she soon found herself at the extremity of the warren, lost in a dream of pastoral life, to which it may easily be imagined that love imparted all the freshness.

But she stopped suddenly on encountering, almost under her feet, the maniac stretched upon the earth, motionless and as if dead. Notwithstanding the disgust inspired by the neglected condition of that unhappy being, she decided, after having vainly attempted to arouse her, to lift her in her arms and convey her to some distance. Not, however, finding herself strong enough to carry this intention into effect, she placed her against a tree, partially raising her, so that she might be supported by it, and decided upon going to obtain assistance from the farm. Bricoline began to awaken from her torpor and to lift with her hands, which were all torn and wounded, her long hair, bristling with grass and gravel, which hung so heavily over her face. Marcelle assisted her to throw aside this heavy veil, which obstructed her respiration, and taking courage, to address her for the first time, she asked her if she suffered.

"Certainly I suffer!" replied the idiot, with frightful indifference, and in the same tone in which she might have said, "I still exist,"

Afterwards she added, in a sharp, imperious voice: "Have

you seen him? He is returned. He would not speak to me. Did he tell you why?"

"He told me that he would return," replied Marcelle, endeavouring to humour her insanity.

"Oh! he will not return," exclaimed the maniac, hastily rising. "He will return no more! He is afraid of me! All the world is afraid of me because I am very rich—very rich—so rich that they have threatened my life! But I will be rich no longer; to-morrow I shall be poor. It is time that all this was ended. To-morrow all the world will be poor. You shall be poor, too, Rose, and then you will have nothing more to fear. I will punish the wicked people who wish to kill me—to shut me up—to poison me ——"

"But there are some people who pity you, and wish to do you good," said Marcelle.

"No, there are not!" angrily replied the maniac, falling into a frightful agitation. "All are my enemies! They have tortured me! They have thrust red-hot iron into my head! They have fastened me with nails to the trees! They have thrown me above a thousand times from the tops of the towers down upon the stones! They have run great steel needles through my heart! They have flayed me alive! and that is the reason why I cannot now dress myself without suffering such horrible pain. They would even tear the hair from my head, because that is a little protection against their blows. But I will be revenged! I have drawn up my complaint. I have taken fifty-four years to write it out in every language, that it may reach all the sovereigns in the universe. I will make them restore Paul to me, whom they have shut up in some of their caves, and whom they are causing to suffer as much as they cause me. I hear his cry every night while they are torturing him. I know his voice.—Stay, stay! do you hear him?" added she in a melancholy tone, her ear catching the cheerful tones of the bagpipes. "You see plainly that they are making him suffer a thousand deaths! They will devour him, but they shall be punished,—punished! To-morrow I will make them suffer also. They shall suffer so much that I shall even pity them myself."

Uttering all this with delirious volubility, the unfortunate being rushed across the wood, directing her steps towards the farm, without its being possible for Marcelle to follow her rapid footsteps and impetuous course.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE VIGIL.

THE dance was continued more obstinately than ever at the farm. The servants had taken part in it, and a thick cloud of dust rose under their feet—a circumstance which never hinders the Berrichon peasant from dancing with enthusiasm, any more than the stones, the sun, the rain, or the fatigues of mowing or harvest-time. There are no people who dance with an equal degree of ardour and gravity at the same time. To see them advance and retire in the *bourrée* so softly and so regularly, we can only compare the perfect precision of their quadrilles to the pendulum of a clock, scarcely guessing in what the pleasure of that monotonous exercise can consist, and still less suspecting the difficulty of learning the elementary measure which each step and each attitude of the body ought to mark with a vigorous accuracy, while a great sobriety of motion and an appearance of languid indifference are necessary for the attainment of perfection, entirely to conceal the labour; but, when some time has been spent in the examination, the spectator becomes astonished at the indefatigable perseverance, and learns to appreciate the soft and natural grace which saves them from exhaustion; and if they observe ever so slightly the same persons dancing for ten or a dozen hours without sinking with fatigue, they must either believe that they have been bitten by a tarantula, or become convinced that they love dancing as a very passion. From time to time the enjoyment of the young people betrays itself by a peculiar cry, which rises without their countenances losing any of the imperturbable seriousness which characterises them; and occasionally, with a stamp of the foot upon the ground, they bound upwards like bulls, descending again with a careless suppleness of limb, and phlegmatically resume the balancing motion of the dance. The character of the Berrichon is perfectly illustrated in this dance. That which is required from the women is to glide lightly over the floor like a ray of the sun, which requires more lightness of motion than might be supposed; and it must be acknowledged that the grace of their motions is marked by an expression of rigid purity.

Rose also danced the *bourrée* as well as any peasant girl—and that is not saying a little—and the heart of her father swelled with pride as he gazed upon her. The prevailing gaiety communicated itself to every individual. The musicians, who had drunk without restraint, spared neither arms nor lungs. The partial obscurity of a splendid night made the dancers appear

more light and graceful, and Rose more so than all the rest; for this charming girl seemed to glide like a white sea-gull over tranquil waters, leaving itself to be borne on the wings of the evening breeze. The soft melancholy which pervaded every movement on that night rendered her even more beautiful than usual.

However, Rose, who was at the bottom of her heart a true peasant of the Black Valley in all her native simplicity, found real pleasure in dancing, were it only to keep herself in practice to answer the numberless invitations which Grand-Louis would not fail to offer her on the morrow. But in a moment the bagpipe-player fell from the barrel which had served him for a pedestal, and the air contained in his instrument escaped, emitting a tone so strange and sorrowful that all the dancers stopped as if by compulsion and turned towards him. At the same moment, the *vielle*, roughly snatched from the hands of another performer, came rolling under the feet of Rose; and the maniac, leaping from the rustic orchestra into which she had darted, with a bound resembling that of a wild-cat, precipitated herself into the midst of the dancers, exclaiming—

"Woe—woe to the assassins! Woe to the tormentors!"

Her next proceeding was to throw herself upon her mother, who had advanced to secure her, and to fasten her grasp upon her throat; she would undoubtedly have strangled her had not her old grandmother Bricolin hindered her from accomplishing this, by throwing her own arms around her body. The lunatic had never been hurried into any act of violence towards her grandmother; for either she had preserved towards her without knowing it a sort of instinctive affection, or she remembered her alone among the number of her relations, or else she treasured the remembrance of what that good woman had done in favour of her love; she therefore made not any great resistance, but suffered herself to be taken by her into the house, sending forth all the while such fearful cries as threw horror and consternation over the minds of all.

When Marcelle, who had followed the eldest Mademoiselle Bricolin as near as possible, arrived at the farm-yard, she found the fête interrupted, everybody alarmed, and Rose nearly fainting Madame Bricolin suffered without doubt most deeply, were it only from seeing this inward wound thus exposed to the eyes of all the world; but in her activity to repress the fury of the lunatic and to stifle the sound of her cries, there was a degree of violence and energy which resembled the firmness of a gendarme incarcerating a disturber of the peace, rather than the solicitude of a despairing mother. The grandmother Bricolin manifested as much zeal, but more sensibility. It was a sorrowful spectacle to see that poor old woman, with her rough voice and her untaught manner, caressing the maniac and speaking to her as if she were a child to be scolded and coaxed by turns.

"Come, my darling!" said she to her; "you who are gene-

rally so good will not grieve your grandmother. You must go to bed quietly, if you don't wish to make me sorry and not love you any more."

The lunatic understood nothing of this discourse, and did not even hear it. Clinging to the foot of her bed, she uttered the most frightful vociferations; and her diseased imagination persuaded her that she was enduring at that moment all the chastisements and tortures of which she had drawn the fantastic picture to Marcelle.

This latter, having first of all assured herself that her child was sleeping tranquilly under the watchful eyes of Fanchon, gave all her attention to Rose, who was almost distracted with grief and fear. This was the first time that Bricoline had given free course to the expression of that hatred which she had been heaping up for a dozen years in the depths of her wounded soul. Once in every week at the most, she shrieked and wept when her grandmother compelled her to change her clothes; but those were the cries of a child, and now these were the cries of a Fury. She had never spoken a word to any one, and now, for the first time during a dozen years, she had offered menaces. She had never before struck any one, and now she seemed disposed to kill her mother. In short, for a dozen years this mute victim of the mercenary spirit of her parents had wandered, in her inexpressible suffering, through every by-place and solitary way, until every one had become so accustomed to the deplorable spectacle as to behold it with a sort of brutal indifference. They no longer feared her—they were weary of pitying her; they submitted to her presence as to an inevitable evil; and, if they were sensible of remorse, they perhaps did not acknowledge it even to themselves. But this frightful evil which was consuming her had its own phases of exhaustion, and, when these arrived, her state of martyrdom became dangerous to others. It was necessary that some measures should now be taken on her account. M. Bricolin, seated in front of his house before the door, listened with an air of stupidity to the coarse condolences of his family.

"This is a great misfortune for you," said one, "and you have supported it too long under your very eyes. This requires a patience beyond human strength, and it is necessary that you should at last decide upon putting this unfortunate girl into a madhouse."

"They cannot cure her," replied he, shaking his head. "I have tried everything. That is impossible; her malady is too great; she will die under it."

"That would be the happiest thing that could befal her. You see very plainly that her life is only one of suffering. But if they cannot cure her, they would at least relieve you from the pain of seeing her, and hinder her from doing you any harm. If you do not put a stop to this, she will end by killing somebody, or perhaps she may kill herself before your very eyes. That would be terrible."

"But what would you have me do? I have said the same things a hundred times to her mother, and her mother will not agree to be separated from her. She still loves her at the bottom of her heart, believe me, which is natural enough. It seems to me that mothers never give over feeling something for their children, whatever the case may be."

"But she would be better in some other place than here, you may be assured. They take great care of these people in such places now. They have beautiful establishments, where they want for nothing. They keep them in a proper condition, they make them work, they oblige them to be occupied; and it is even said that they provide them with amusement and music, and that they take them to mass."

"In that case they must be more happy than with us," said M. Bricolin.

After an instant's consideration, he added, "And would all that cost a great deal?"

Rose was deeply affected. She was the only one, with the exception of her grandmother, who had not become insensible to the sufferings of poor Bricoline. If she forbore to speak of them, it was because she could not do so without accusing her parents of that moral murder committed by them; but twenty times a-day she suppressed a shudder of indignation at hearing from her mother's lips those selfish and avaricious maxims to which her sister had been sacrificed. As soon as she had recovered from her swoon, she would have gone to help her grandmother to soothe the maniac; but Madame Bricolin, who feared that such a spectacle might have too strong an impression on her, and who felt a vague instinct that poor Bricoline's excessive anguish might become contagious, even in its physical results, sent her away with that harshness which she could not help displaying, even when she was acting on the best-founded feelings of maternal solicitude. Rose felt much aggrieved at this refusal, and retired to her chamber, where she walked backwards and forwards a part of the night, a prey to excessive excitement, but keeping silence for fear of expressing herself with too great a vehemence before Marcelle, on account of her parents.

This night, which had begun with so much pleasure, ended with extreme pain for Madame de Blanchemont. The cries of the maniac ceased at intervals only to be renewed again with more terrible and more alarming energy. These pauses were not the result of a growing feebleness, sinking gradually into a state of exhaustion, but, on the contrary, they were abrupt and instantaneous in the midst of their most violent intensity, and as if they had been suddenly interrupted by a death of violence.

"Might not anybody believe that they were killing her?" cried Rose, on the occasions of these renewed paroxysms, pale and scarcely able to support herself across the chamber. "Yes, that certainly resembles a cry of torture."

Marcelle could not bear to make her acquainted with the terrible sufferings which the lunatic believed herself to be enduring in those moments. She concealed from her the interview which she had had with her sister in the park. From time to time she went to visit the afflicted being, whom she found stretched upon the floor, her arms tightly embracing the foot of her bed, and as if suffocating with the fatigue of her continued cries, but with her exes fixed and open, and her mind evidently always at work. The grandmother, on her knees before her, in vain endeavoured to slip a pillow under her head, or to introduce into her firmly-contracted mouth a spoonful of a calming draught. Madame Bricolin, seated on an arm-chair directly opposite, pale and motionless, bore in the energetic and strongly-marked character of her countenance the traces of a profound sorrow, though she would not confess her crime even to God himself. The awkward Chounette, standing in a corner, sobbed mechanically, without offering her services and without any one thinking of claiming them. There was an expression of despairing hopelessness in the countenance of each of the three. The maniac alone, in the intervals of her vociferations, appeared to have dark thoughts of hatred revolving through her mind. They could hear the sounds of snoring from the adjoining chamber, but the dull, deep sleep of M. Bricolin was agitated and disturbed. Distressing dreams seemed to haunt him at intervals. More distant still, at the end of the opposite partition, they heard the coughing and complainings of the grandfather Bricolin, a stranger to the sufferings of others, having scarcely sufficient strength remaining to enable him to support his own.

At last, when it was nearly three o'clock in the morning, the force of the storm of passion appeared to have exhausted the bodily powers of Bricoline. She subsided into sleep, and they were enabled to lay her in her bed unconsciously to herself. There could be no doubt that it was a long time since she had enjoyed a moment's repose, for she now appeared to sleep profoundly. Favoured by this change, the whole household betook themselves to rest, even including Rose herself, to whom Madame de Blanchemont hastened to carry this better news.

If in all these painful circumstances Marcelle had not felt her better feelings excited to act as a comforter to the afflicted Rose, she would have regretted the unhappy impulse which had driven her into that habitation of avarice and misery. But for this feeling she would have hastened to seek another place of dwelling, far different from this one, so uncongenial to her poetic temperament, so unpleasant in its prosperity, so mournful in its disgrace. But whatever new misery might arise, and to whatever fresh perplexity she might be exposed, she determined to remain there as long as she should be enabled to succour her young friend. Happily the morning was calm. Every one rose later than usual, and Rose still slept

when Madame de Blanchemont, scarcely awake herself, received from Paris, thanks to the rapidity of our present mode of communication, the following answer to the letter which, three days before, she had written to her stepmother:—

My Daughter,—Let that Providence which has sent you so much courage deign to sustain it still. I am not astonished at the part you have decided to take, although it is so noble. Neither must you praise my courage. At my age, we cannot have a long time to suffer. At yours, happily we cannot have any exact ideas of the length or the troubles of life. My daughter, your projects are laudable, excellent, and are as wise as they are necessary; far more necessary than you imagine. We also, my dear Marcelle—we also are ruined! and we perhaps shall have no inheritance to leave to our beloved grandson. The debts of my unhappy son exceed all that you knew—all that we could have anticipated. We will make arrangements with the creditors and take the responsibility upon ourselves; and this must deprive Edward, at some future time, of that honourable independence to which he had a right to aspire at our decease. Educate him therefore with simple habits. Teach him to create resources for himself by his talents, and to maintain his independence by the dignity with which he will know how to support this misfortune. When he shall have reached the age of manhood, we shall no longer be in this world. But he will respect the aged parents who have preserved the honour of a gentleman, preferring that to his pleasures, and who will have left him only a name pure and without reproach for an inheritance. The child of a bankrupt could enjoy none of the pleasures of life, excepting culpable indulgence, and the son of a culpable father will at least be under some obligations to those who shall have sheltered his life from public blame.

To-morrow I will send you all the details. To-day I am stricken with the discovery of this new abyss. I have told it to you in few words. I know that you understand it all, and endure it all. Adieu, my daughter; I admire and I love you.

"Edward!" exclaimed Marcelle, covering her boy with kisses while he slept, "it was then written in heaven that you should have the glory and perhaps the happiness of not succeeding to the riches and rank of your ancestors. Thus perish the largest fortunes, the works of ages, in a single day! Thus the old masters of the world, led on by fate rather than by their own passions, charge themselves with the accomplishment of the decrees of Divine Wisdom, which all the while is working imperceptibly to equalize the power of man. Oh, my child! may you one day comprehend that the operation of this law of Providence is favourable to you, since it throws you into the flock of sheep which is at the right hand of Christ, and separates you from the goats on his left. My Maker! give me the strength and wisdom necessary to make this child a man! for, to make him a patrician, I should have had but to cross my arms and leave riches to operate by themselves. Now I have need of light and inspiration! Thou hast appointed me to fulfil this task and thou wilt not abandon me!

"Lémor," she wrote an instant afterwards, "my son is ruined—his family is ruined! My son is poor. Had he been

rich, perhaps he would have been base and contemptible. As a poor man he must act so as to ennoble poverty. This commission has been reserved for you by Providence. Now will you ever talk of abandoning me? This child, who was heretofore a barrier between us, is he not now a tie the most sacred? Unless you no longer love me, at the expiration of this year, what can now oppose our happiness? Have courage, my friend, and go. In a year you shall return and rejoin me in some thatched cottage of the Black Valley, not very distant from the mill of Angibault."

Marcelle wrote these few lines with exultation; only when her pen traced this phrase, "Unless you no longer love me at the expiration of this year," an almost imperceptible smile imparted to her features an ineffable expression. To explain this note, she enclosed in it that of her mother-in-law, and, sealing them up, she put them in her pocket, being fully persuaded that at no distant period she should see the Miller again, and perhaps Lemor himself, in that peasant dress which he wore so gracefully.

The maniac slept the whole of the day. She was in a fever; yet she had never been exempt from fever for a single day for the last dozen years; and this excessive depression, which she had never shown before, made them believe that a favourable crisis had arrived. The doctor, who had been sent for from the town, and who was in the habit of attending her, did not consider her disorder to be more aggravated than usual. Rose, much reassured, felt all the cheerfulness of youth revive within her, and deliberately dressed herself with coquettish care. She wished to attire herself simply, so as not to alarm her friend in making too great a display of wealth, and yet she desired to look to advantage also. She sought, therefore, the most ingenious combinations, and succeeded in looking as modest as a village maiden, and as beautiful as an angel of Paradise. Although she might not have desired to render an account of her thoughts in the midst of all her sorrow, she had trembled a little at the idea of losing the merriment of the day. At eighteen years of age it is scarcely possible to surrender without regret the bewildering a lover for a whole day, and this fear had stolen into her mind, although unknown to herself, and had mingled with the sincere and profound sorrow which she experienced on her sister's account. When she entered the church to attend high mass, Grand-Louis had been long watching for her entrance. He had placed himself in such a position as not to lose sight of her for an instant. She found her way, as if by chance, close to Grand'Marie, and he saw her tenderly put her handsome shawl under his mother's knees, in defiance of the good woman's opposition to her kindness.

After the duties of the service were over, Rose adroitly took the arm of her grandmother, who was accustomed to keep close company with her old friend, the Miller's mother, when-

ever she had the pleasure of meeting with her. This pleasure, however, became every year more and more rare, as age rendered the distance between Blanchemont and Angibault more difficult for the two matrons to pass over. The grandmother Bricolin loved a chat. "Being," as she said, "continually repulsed by her daughter-in-law, she had a perfect tide of words to pour into the confiding bosom of the Miller's mother, who, less communicative, but sincerely attached to the companion of her youth, listened to her with patience, and answered with judgment.

In this manner Rose hoped to escape for the whole day from the superintendence of Madame Bricolin, and even from the society of her other relatives, her grandmother loving much better the company of the peasants, who were on an equality with herself, than that of the upstarts of her family.

Under the old trees which crowned the rising ground, with a charming view of the country spreading out before them, a crowd of lovely girls were pressing round the musicians, who were posted two and two upon trestles placed for the purpose a little distance from each other; opening the campaign with all the power both of arms and lungs, delivering themselves up to the most jealous rivalry, each playing his tune at his own rate, without disturbing themselves at the frightful discord produced by this confusion of brawling instruments, and every one of them exerting himself to contradict the time and tune of his neighbour. In the midst of this musical chaos, the dancers in the different quadrilles stood inflexibly to their posts, never confounding the music for which their own party were playing with that which was being thundered out a couple of steps distant; never making a false step in marking the measure, but preserved from these errors by the accuracy of the ear and the power of habit. The surrounding shades echoed with sounds no less heterogeneous: in one place, there was singing at the highest possible pitch of the human voice; in another, parties were talking of business matters with passionate excitement; some jingling glasses together in good fellowship, others threatening to throw the tankards at each other's heads, the whole enhanced by the native gendarmes, who made their circuits with a paternal air through the midst of the crowd, and whose presence sufficed to retain that peaceable population within the bounds of order, as their words very rarely ended in blows.

The compact circle which had formed itself round the first *bourrées* grew thicker still when the charming Rose opened the dance with the handsome Miller. They were the finest-looking couple at the fête, and their footsteps, at once so light and firm, electrified the beholders. The Miller's mother could not refrain from pointing them out to the grandmother Bricolin, and she even added that it was a misfortune that these young people, so good and so handsome, were not destined for each other.

"*Fié pour moi*" (that is to say, for my part), replied the old farmer's wife, "I should not hesitate if I were mistress; for I am sure that your son would make my grand-daughter happier than she will ever be with another; I know very well that Grand-Louis loves her, though he does not wish to speak about it. But what would you do, my poor Marie? At our house we think of nothing but money. I was so stupid as to give up everything to my son, and from that time they never listen to a word I have to say, any more than if I were dead. If I had acted otherwise, I should have had the right of marrying Rose according to my own will, by giving her a marriage portion. But as things are, I have nothing left but my good-will, and that is a sort of money which does not pass for much with us."

Notwithstanding the address which Rose had put in practice in passing from one group to another to avoid her mother, and to keep herself either side by side or opposite to her friend, Madame Bricolin and her party succeeded in joining and surrounding her. Her cousins obliged her to dance with them until she was exhausted, and Grand-Louis prudently removed to a distance, feeling that if he were involved in the slightest quarrel, his passion would exceed his reason. They had endeavoured to open the attack by cutting witticisms, but the clear and courageous glance of his large blue eyes, his calm contempt and his gigantic stature, had at once, and with ease, subdued the insolence of the Bricolins. When he had retired, they gave themselves up to the joy of their hearts, and Rose was much surprised to hear her sisters, her sisters-in-law, and her innumerable cousins, pronounce upon the Miller as they gathered round her, that this great fellow looked like a fool, that he danced ridiculously, that he seemed to be puffed up with pretensions, and that not any one among them would dance with him for all the world. Rose was not without self-love; and her family had too obstinately laboured to develope this defect for her not to be subject to relapse into it sometimes. Her relations had done everything in their power to corrupt and debase her good and liberal nature, and if they had failed of success, it was because there are some incorruptible souls over which the spirit of evil cannot obtain the victory. Now she could not avoid suffering some vexation at hearing her lover so obstinately and bitterly aspersed. Her temper was disturbed, and not daring to promise to dance with him again, and declaring that she had got the headache, she returned to the farm, after having vainly sought Marcelle, whose influençe over her, if it had been exerted, she fully believed would soon have restored her courage and tranquillity.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COTTAGE.

MARCELLE had been awaiting the Miller at the bottom of the little hill, as it was thus that he had expressly recommended. Just on the stroke of two o'clock she saw him enter within a deeply-shaded enclosure, making her a sign to follow him. After crossing one of the peasants' little gardens, so ill kept and consequently so luxuriantly overgrown, she entered, gliding under the hedge, into the yard of one of the poorest cottages of the Black Valley. This yard was twenty feet long and six in width, shut in on one side by the cottage, on the other side by the garden, and at each end by palings of fagots covered with straw, which served to keep in some fowls, two sheep, and a goat; that is to say, all the riches of the man who gains his bread only from day to day, and who possesses nothing more, not even the pitiful cottage which he inhabits, or the narrow enclosure which he cultivates: this is the true rustic pauper. The interior of the house was quite as miserable as its approach, and Marcelle was touched to see by what excessive cleanliness the courage of the woman struggled against the horrors of that almost naked habitation. The rugged and unequal surface of the ground was perfectly clear from even a grain of dust; the two or three articles of miserable furniture were as bright and shining as if they had been varnished, while the little earthen vessels, placed on shelves against the wall, were washed and arranged with the utmost care. Among the greater part of the peasants of the Black Valley, the deepest and fullest misery is wisely and nobly concealed under conscientious habits of cleanliness and order. The poor rustic there is tender and affectionate. People might even cheerfully live among these indigent inhabitants. They do not inspire disgust, but interest, and even a species of respect. How little of the superfluities of the rich would it require to remove the bitterness of their life, which they conceal under the appearance of poetical tranquillity!

This reflection struck Marcelle to the heart, when Piaulette advanced to meet her with one child in her arms and three others hanging on by her apron, all dressed in their Sunday clothes, and clean and neat. This Piaulette (or Pauline) was still young and handsome, though worn down by a mother's cares, and privation of those things which are the real necessaries of life. Neither meat nor wine, not even vegetables, for a woman who was nourishing her child while she

laboured. Yet, notwithstanding, all these children might have bartered some of their glowing health to Marcelle, and the mother had a smile of kindness and confidence upon her pale and withered lips.

"Pray come in to us and sit down, madam," said she, offering her a straw chair covered with a coarse hempen cloth thoroughly well washed, "The gentleman on whose account you have come has already been here; and not finding you he has gone to take a turn among the people at the fête, but will return directly. If I could offer you something in the mean time—here are freshly-gathered plums and nuts. Come, Grand-Louis, pray take some of the fruit from my garden yourself also. I wish I had it in my power to offer you a glass of wine; but we have not the smallest quantity, as you know very well, and if it were not for you we should not always have bread."

"Are you so very poor?" said Marcelle, slipping a piece of gold into the pocket of the little girl, who was touching with astonishment her dress of black silk; "and does Grand-Louis, who is not very rich himself, come to your assistance?"

"He!" replied Piaulette, "he is the best-hearted man that God ever made! Without him we should have died of cold and hunger three winters ago; but he gave us corn and wood, and he lent us his horses when we were ill, and were obliged to take a journey; he ——"

"That is quite enough, Piaulette, to make me pass for a saint," said the Miller, interrupting her. "Truly it is a very great thing on my part not to have abandoned so good a workman as your husband."

"So good a workman!" said Piaulette, shaking her head. "Poor dear man! M. Bricolin always says that he is idle because he has not very much strength."

"But he does what he can. For my own part I like people who work with a good will, and on that account I always employ them."

"It is that which makes M. Bricolin say that you will never be rich, and that you cannot have any sense to employ people in ill health."

"Ah, well, if nobody will employ them they must die of hunger. Fine reasoning that!"

"But you know," said Marcelle, sorrowfully, "the sort of moral which M. Bricolin would extract from that:—'All the worse for them!'"

"Mamselle Rose is very good," resumed Piaulette, "she would if she could help all the unhappy. But she can do nothing, poor young lady, but bring a little white bread by stealth to make meat for the baby; and she will do that, though I do not wish her, for if her mother saw her!—oh, the rough woman! But such is the world, some good and some bad. Ah! here is M. Tailland coming. You have not had to wait a long time."

"Piaulette, you know what I desired," said the Miller, putting his finger upon his lips.

"Oh," replied she, "I would rather cut my tongue out than say a word."

"It is, you see, because ——"

"You have no occasion to explain to me why or wherefore, Grand-Louis. It is sufficient that you order me to be silent. Come, children," said she to the three little ones who were playing at the door, "let us go and see a little of the festival."

"This lady has put a gold louis into the pocket of your little girl," said Grand-Louis to her in a low voice; "it is not to pay for your discretion, for she knows that you would not sell it, but it is because she sees that you are in necessity. The child might lose it, so take care of it yourself, but do not thank her; the lady does not like fine speeches, and you may see that because she did this out of charity in secret."

M. Tailland was an honest man, and very active for a Berrichon, sufficiently clever in business, and only a little too fond of his ease. He liked comfortable easy-chairs, nice little luncheons, good long dinners, well-made coffee, and smooth roads for his cabriolet. He had, however, found none of these things at the Blanchemont fête; and yet while railing against the pleasures of the country he would willingly have remained there a whole day together to be of use to one, or to arrange the business of another. In a quarter of an hour's conversation he very quickly demonstrated to Marcelle the possibility, and even the probability, of selling her estate at a high price. But as to parting with it at once, and receiving immediate payment, he certainly was not of the same opinion as the Miller.

"Nothing can be done quickly in our part of the world," said he; "however, it would be very foolish not to try to get fifty thousand francs more than the price offered by Bricolin. I will certainly do my best to manage it. If I should not succeed during the next month, perhaps I might advise you, in your peculiar position, to concede this point. But I would bet a hundred to one, that Bricolin, who burns with impatience to be lord of Blanchemont, will between this and then give up the point, that is, if you know how to put on the appearance of rigid determination—a barbarous quality, but very necessary, and one that I see very clearly, madam, you are not very well able to command. Now, will you sign the power of attorney that I have brought with me, and allow me to go? because I do not wish to have the appearance of having plotted against my colleague, M. Varin, whom your farmer would most likely have induced you to choose as your man of business."

Grand-Louis reconducted the notary to the entrance of the enclosure, where they divided, and each took his separate way It had been arranged that Marcelle should leave the place the last and alone, a few minutes after the others, and that she should draw the doors of the house quite close, so that if any one were observing their movements, he might be induced to believe that the house was deserted.

The door of the cottage was formed of a single piece of wood, cut in two transversely, the upper part serving the purpose of a window to give air and light. In the old-fashioned cottages of our peasants, those of the most antiquated construction, window casements independent of the door, and furnished with glass, are unknown. The dwelling of Piaulette had been built fifty years, and had been designed for the use of a somewhat more opulent class, yet now it could only be ranked with the poorest, for in the present day the smallest houses are built with glazed windows, and a door that will lock; but in the cottage of Piaulette the door with its double purpose closed both from within and without by the help of a *coret* or wooden bolt, which is fastened into a hole in the wall, from which come the old words *coriller* and *décoriller*, purporting to shut and to open.

When Marcelle had thus shut herself in she found herself in the deepest obscurity, and then she began to ask herself what degree of intellectual existence could those people be supposed to enjoy, who, being too poor for the indulgence of a light, were compelled either to go to bed, or to pass the long winter nights in darkness, and even to spend the day in that obscurity, to preserve themselves from the severity of the cold.

"I said to myself that I believed I was ruined," thought she, "because I was compelled to leave my gilded chamber so softly wadded and so richly hung with silk, and yet how many degrees in the scale of social existence must I travel over before I reach this life of poverty, which differs so little from mere animal existence! Here there is no medium between supporting at all hours the severity of the climate, and of being buried in the nonentity of idleness, like the sheep in his fold. And how can this wretched family occupy themselves through the long winter nights? In talking? and of what can they talk, except of their privations? Ah! Lémor was right. I am still too rich to dare to say to God that I possess nothing with which to reproach myself!"

By this time the eyes of Marcelle had become accustomed to the obscurity. The door closing imperfectly suffered the light to penetrate through the crevices, and though vague and indistinct at first, it became gradually clearer. Struck with a sudden perception, Marcelle trembled at discovering that she was not alone in that chamber, but her second emotion was not caused by fear. Lémor was there. He had hid himself, unknown to everybody, behind the serge curtains of the bed, encouraged by the hope of obtaining an interview with Marcelle, saying to himself that it was the last, and that afterwards he must depart.

"Since you are here," she said to him, endeavouring to conceal the pleasure and emotion of her surprise with a sort of tender coquetry, "I will tell you boldly of what I was thinking. If we were reduced to dwell in this cottage, could your love withstand the sufferings of the day and the weariness of

the evening? Could you live deprived of your books, or unable to use them for want of a drop of oil in the lamp, or from the inability to snatch time from incessant toil for their enjoyment? After some years of weariness and privation of every kind, would you still think this dwelling picturesque in its dilapidation, and this life of poverty poetical in its simplicity?"

"The same thoughts have been passing in my mind, Marcelle, and I contemplated asking you the same questions. Could you still love me if I were to drag you, in my Utopian views, into a state of wretchedness like this?"

"I feel that I could, Lémor."

"And why then do you doubt me? Ah, you are not sincere in answering me thus."

"Am I not sincere?" said Marcelle, placing both her hands in those of Lémor. "My friend, I am resolved to be worthy of you. It is on this account that I am anxious to sustain that romantic exaltation of mind which enables even a woman of the world to affirm everything, to promise everything, even though she would consider herself bound to nothing, and should say on the next day, yesterday I composed a pretty romance. For my own part, I never pass a day without severely interrogating my own conscience; and I believe I am sincere in answering you that I can paint no situation to myself, were it even a dungeon with all its horrors, where the power of suffering could make me cease to love you."

"Oh, Marcelle! dear and noble Marcelle! But why then do you doubt me?"

"Because the mind of man is different from that of woman. He is accustomed to other aliments than those of tenderness and solitude. He must be active, he must labour, he must hope to be useful, not only to his family, but to the whole human race."

"Thus it is not a duty for him to precipitate himself voluntarily into the impotence of misery."

"Do we live then in an age in which duties are contradictory? for only those can have strength of mind who have the light of instruction, and only those can command instruction who possess the power of money: and yet all that is acquired, all that is enjoyed, all that is possessed, is to the injury of those who are unable to acquire or possess either heavenly or earthly wealth."

"You judge me by my own Utopian schemes, Marcelle. I can give you no other answer, excepting that we live in an age of extreme and inevitable inconsistency, in which kind hearts desire the good and are compelled to accept the evil. People do not fail to find out reasons to prove each to himself, as do all the happy of the age, that they ought to make it their aim to refine and edify themselves, in order to qualify themselves to become powerful and active instruments in the service of their fellow-creatures; but to sacrifice themselves, to abase and humble themselves like the first Christians in the deserts, that

would be only to neutralize the strength and to stifle the light which God has sent to man for his instruction and salvation. But there is great pride in this reasoning, so just as it may appear in the mouths of certain good and enlightened men. It is the reasoning of the aristocracy. 'Let us preserve our wealth, that we may give alms,' say the devotees of your class. 'It is we,' say the heads of the Church, 'whom God has ordained to enlighten men.' 'It is we,' say the democrats, 'we only, whose duty it is to initiate the people into the rights of liberty.' Yet see what the united powers of charity, education, and liberty, have bestowed upon the unhappy! No; individual charity can do nothing, the church will do nothing, and modern liberality knows nothing. I feel my spirits sink and my heart die within my breast, when I imagine what may be the issue of the labryinth in which we find ourselves involved, we and others with us who are searching for the truth, and to whom society only responds by contempt and menaces. Marcelle, Marcelle, let us love on, for the Spirit of God will not abandon us!"

"Let us love on!" exclaimed Marcelle, throwing herself into the arms of her lover, "and leave me not, abandon me not to my ignorance, Lemor, for you have brought me forth from the narrow sphere of Catholicism, where I was peacefully resting my safety, placing the decision of my confessor above that of my Saviour, and consoling myself with not being a Christian to the very letter, because a priest had said to me, '*Il est avec le ciel des accommodements.*' You have opened to me a wider sphere, and henceforth I shall never enjoy an instant of repose, if you abandon me without a guide in this pale twilight of the truth."

"And even I know nothing," replied Lemor, sorrowfully. "I am but the child of my own day. I do not possess skill enough to anticipate the future. I only know how to comprehend and reason on the past. Torrents of light have passed before me, and like all who have the ardour of youth and purity of intention in our own day, I have rushed towards those great lights which are able to undeceive us, and are yet unable to give us truth. I hate the wrong, I am ignorant of the right. I suffer, ah! I suffer, Marcelle! and I find only in you that beautiful ideal which I would see reign over the earth. Oh! I love you with all the love which men are repulsing from the midst of them, with all the devotion which is paralyzed in society, and which it refuses to receive, with all the tenderness which it is impossible to communicate to others, with all the charity which God has implanted within me both for you and for them, but which you can only comprehend and feel like myself, while the rest of the world are insensible and disdainful. Let us love on then, without corrupting ourselves by mixing with those who triumph and without debasing ourselves with those who submit. Let us love on, like two voyagers who cross the seas to conquer a

new country, a new world, but without knowing whether they shall ever reach it. Let us love on, not for the sake of being happy in the *égoïsme à deux*, as love is called, but to suffer together, to pray together, to seek together what we two poor birds, equally exposed to the storm, may be able to accomplish day by day to conjure away the plague which disperses our race, and to gather under our wings some worn-out fugitives, sorrowful and apprehensive like ourselves."

Lemor wept like a child as he folded Marcelle to his heart. Marcelle, carried away by a glowing sympathy and an enthusiastic respect, fell on her knees before him like a child at its father's feet, saying—

"Save me, and do not leave me to perish! You have been in this place some little while, and you have heard me consult a man of business respecting affairs of money. I suffered myself to be persuaded to struggle against poverty, to save my son from ignorance and moral helplessness. If you condemn me for this, if you can prove to me that my son will be better and greater by submitting to poverty, I may possibly find the fearful courage to make him suffer in his body for the sake of strengthening his soul."

"Oh, Marcelle!" exclaimed Lemor, forcing her to rise, and in his turn throwing himself upon his knees before her, "you have all the strength and resolution of the greatest saints and the loftiest martyrs of bygone times! But where are the waters of baptism to which we may carry your child? The church of the poor is not yet instituted, and they live dispersed in the absence of all doctrine, following every various inspiration. Some resign themselves through habit, some are idolaters through stupidity, others are ferocious through vengeance, and others again are disgraced by all the vices of the abandoned and the brutalized. We could not ask the first beggar who passed by to lay his hand upon your son and give him his blessing. This beggar has suffered too much to love, and perhaps he may even be a bandit. Keep your child sheltered from evil as much as possible; teach him the love of virtue, and the necessity of enlightenment. Perhaps light may break on this generation. They may even one day instruct us. Keep your fortune; how could I ever reproach you with it, when I see that your heart is entirely detached from it, and that you consider it as a deposit of which heaven will require the account. Preserve the little gold which you have left. The good Miller said the other day, 'There are some hands which purify, just as there are others which sully and corrupt.' Let us love on, let us love on, and trust that God will enlighten us when his own day shall come. And now, adieu, Marcelle! I see that you wish that this effort of courage to part should come from me. It shall be so. To-morrow I will leave this sweet and beautiful valley, where I have spent two days so happily in spite of everything. In a year I will return here again. Whether you are in a palace or a cottage, I

see clearly that I shall be impelled to prostrate myself at your door, and hang up my pilgrim's staff, never to resume it."

Lémor withdrew, and a few moments after, Marcelle quitted the cottage in her turn. But notwithstanding the precaution which she had used to cover her retreat, she found herself face to face at the edge of the enclosure with an ill-looking boy, who was crouched behind a bush, apparently waiting for her to pass. He looked at her fixedly with an air of effrontery, and then, as if he were delighted at having discovered her, he set off at a run in the direction of the mill, which is situated on the border of the Vauvre, on the opposite side of the road. Marcelle thought that this disagreeable-looking object was not wholly unknown to her; and after some trouble she recollected that this was the *patachon* who had so recently lost his way when he was driving her through the Black Valley, and who had left her in the morass. The sight of his red head and jealous eye seemed to augur evil, and occasioned her some anxiety, and the more so because she could not imagine what interest this boy could possibly have in watching her proceedings.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE FETE.

THE Miller had returned to the dance, hoping to find Rose relieved from what he disdainfully called her *cousinaille;* but Rose was displeased with her relations, with the dance, and even with herself. She was experiencing some remorse at not having had the courage to resent the taunts of her family.

Her father had taken her aside that morning. "Rose," he said to her, "your mother has forbidden you to dance with Grand-Louis of Angibault, but for my part I forbid you to offer him such an affront as to refuse him. He is an honest man, incapable of compromising you; and, besides, who would ever think of any connexion between you and him? That would be too unsuitable, and, *au jour d'aujourd'hui*, no one would suppose that a peasant would dare to reckon on a girl of your rank. Dance with him, then. We must not mortify our inferiors: we have always need of them one day or another; and we ought to take the opportunity of attaching them to us when it costs us nothing."

"But my mother will scold me," replied Rose, happy at the same time at being thus authorized, though wounded at the motive which dictated it.

"Your mother will say nothing about it. I have explained the moral of the tale to her," answered M. Bricolin.

And, in fact, Madame Bricolin had not made any observation. She had not dared to disobey her lord and master, who permitted her to be as spiteful as she pleased to others, on the single condition that she submitted to his will; but as he had not judged it proper to instruct her in his views, and as she was ignorant of the importance which he attached to preserving an alliance with the Miller in this diplomatic affair of acquiring the Blanchemont domain, she had eluded his commands, and her ironical condescension was far more vexatious to Grand-Louis than the most open war.

Wearied with not seeing Rose, and reckoning upon the favour of her father, whom he had seen return to the farm, Grand-Louis went there also, seeking a pretext to chat with him, that he might thus indulge himself with the sight of the object of his thoughts. He was, therefore, very much surprised to find M. Bricolin in his court-yard in deep consultation with the Miller of Blanchemont, whose mill was situated at the foot of the little hill just facing Piaulette's cottage. This was the more remarkable, as M. Bricolin had been only a few

days before irreconcilably enraged against the miller, with whom he had done business for some time, and who, according to his account, had stolen his corn most abominably. This miller, whether innocent or guilty, very much regretted having lost the custom of the farm, and had sworn vengeance and hatred against Grand-Louis. He had only waited for an opportunity to injure him, and now he had found it. The landlord of his mill was none other than M. Ravalard, to whom the Miller of Angibault had sold Marcelle's caleche. Proud and happy at displaying his carriage before his tenants, M. Ravalard, in passing, thought he would give a master's glance at property which he possessed at Blanchemont; but, not having a servant competent to drive a pair of horses, he had required the abilities of the red-headed *patachon*, whose occupation was that of a driver, and who boasted that he perfectly knew the roads of the Black Valley. M. Ravalard had arrived, if not without trouble at least without accident, on the morning of the fête-day. He had put up his horses at the mill, but had not had his carriage placed in a coach-house, in order that the whole company on the top of the hill might contemplate its grandeur and know to whom it belonged.

The sight of that brilliant equipage had already greatly jaundiced the mind of M. Bricolin, who detested M. Ravalard, his rival in landed property in the commune. He had descended by the road along the Vauvre, on purpose to criticise and examine the caleche. The miller, Grauchon, the rival of Grand-Louis, had approached and entered into conversation with him, without appearing to recollect this enmity; and he had not lost the opportunity of insinuating the provocation that his landlord stood in the highest position of the two, since he rolled in his carriage. Upon this, M. Bricolin began to undervalue the vehicle, saying that it was nothing but an old one of the prefect's which had been mended and painted up—a mere wheelbarrow, and without solidity; and that in all likelihood it would not leave the Black Valley quite so flauntingly as it had entered. Grauchon defended the discernment of his landlord, and the quality of his purchase, saying that it had belonged to Madame de Blanchemont, and that Grand-Louis had in this case acted as her commissioner. M. Bricolin, surprised and provoked, listened to all the details of the transaction, and was convinced that the Miller of Angibault had decided M. Ravalard to snatch at that object of luxury, by telling him that it would enrage M. Bricolin to see it in his possession. All this was unfortunately but too true. M. Ravalard had been talking the whole length of the road with the *patachon*. The latter, being desirous of keeping in his good graces, and seeing his employer intoxicated with the possession of his new carriage, spoke to him of nothing else. He had never seen anything so beautiful, so light, and so easy to drive, as that caleche. It must have cost at least four thousand francs, and was worth double in the country. M. Ravalard, flattered by

the simple admiration of his conductor, had entered confidentially into the details of the affair; and the latter, while breakfasting at the Blanchemont mill, had indulged in boasting to the miller Grauchon of what he knew. Finding that Grand-Louis was looked upon there both with hatred and envy, he had exaggerated every circumstance, as much for the pleasure of exciting jealousy and gaining attention, as on account of the ill-will which he nourished against Grand-Louis for his cutting raillery on the day of his adventure in the morass.

A few moments after M. Bricolin had quitted Grauchon with a frowning brow and a surly air, the miller saw Grand-Louis and Marcelle enter the cottage of Piaulette. He was struck with the apparent mystery of this meeting, and he racked his brain to find some new occasion of injury to his enemy. He placed the *patachon* in ambuscade, and, at the end of an hour, he knew that Grand-Louis, an unknown person, who looked like the miller's new man, the young lady of Blanchemont, and M. Tailland the notary, had been all shut up in grand consultation in the cottage of Piaulette; that each of them had left the place separately, taking great, though, as it proved, useless precautions to escape observation; in short, that they were weaving some plot—something most probably connected with money, as the notary was mixed up with the transaction. Grauchon was not ignorant that the honest attorney was the detestation and the terror of M. Bricolin. Guessing about half the truth, he hastened to go and complaisantly inform Bricolin of all the details, and to compliment him on the way in which the Miller of Angibault promoted his interests. This was the interesting conversation that Grand-Louis interrupted on entering the court-yard of the farm.

Under any other circumstances, our honest Miller would have gone straight up to his accuser, and compelled him to give an explanation; but seeing Bricolin rudely turn his back upon him, and Grauchon survey him with an air of mingled sullenness and irony, he inquired with some anxiety what serious affair could have arisen between two men who, the very night before, *ne se seraient pas donné un coup de bonnet derrière l'eglise:* that is to say, who would not have bowed to each other had they met face to face in the narrowest street of the town. Grand-Louis could not imagine what it could be that was thus being discussed between them, nor even whether he himself were or were not the subject of this private conversation; but his conscience certainly offered him some reproaches. He had endeavoured to play a delicate game with M. Bricolin. Instead of repulsing with contempt the offer of money which the latter had made to him to promote his interests to the detriment of those of Marcelle, he had pretended to fall in with his views for the sake of a dance or two with Rose. He had suffered M. Bricolin to hope that he was co-operating with him, while to avenge the insult of these offers, he had practised upon him and deceived him.

"I richly deserve," thought he, "that my fine invention should be exposed. This is the result of finessing. My mother always used to tell me that it was one of the customs of the country that always brought down misfortune, and yet I have not been able to keep myself out of it. If I had shown myself an honest man to this worthless farmer, such as I am at the bottom of my heart, he might have hated me, but he would have respected and perhaps feared me also, which he cannot do now, if he discover that I have been talking like a Marchois Grand-Louis, my friend, you have acted like a fool! All bad actions are stupid: may they never recoil upon yourself."

Tormented, alarmed, and discontented with himself, he went to rejoin his mother on the little hill, and to propose to reconduct her to Angibault. Vespers were over, and Grand' Marie had already said farewell to her neighbours, and had desired Johnny to tell his master to amuse himself a little longer, but not to return too late.

Grand-Louis knew not how to profit by this permission. Engrossed by a thousand anxieties, he wandered about until the sun had set, without enjoyment, waiting to see whether Rose would reappear, or whether her father would return and let him understand the position of affairs.

When evening approaches the inhabitants of the hamlet amuse themselves much better than during the day of the fête. The *gendarmes*, tired of doing nothing, begin to take their horses and depart. The people of the town and the adjacent neighbourhood mount their vehicles of every possible description, not wishing to be out in the bad roads during the darkness of the night. The little merchants pack up their baggage, and the curé goes gaily to supper with a few of his brethren, who have come to look at the dancing, sighing perhaps at not being able to take part in that culpable pleasure. The inhabitants of the place are thus left alone at last in possession of the place, with the musicians, who perhaps have made no great profit of the day, and who are desirous of indemnifying themselves by prolonging it. Then everybody knows each other; and once in motion, they reward themselves for having been dispersed, looked at, and perhaps laughed at, by the strangers; for in the Black Valley they call everybody a stranger who lives more than a league from the place. Then all the remaining portion of the population begin to dance, even the elder members of the families, and friends who have not dared to show themselves in its mazes during the zenith of the day: even the fat servant of the *cabaret*, who had been exerting herself from the earliest morning in serving the customers, tucked up her smoky apron that she might enter into the spirit of the dance, and flutter about with graces certainly obsolete. Even the little hunchbacked tailor, who would have made the young girls blush, now whispers in their ears "that at night all cats are grey."

Rose, tired of being out of temper, returned with the desire

of amusing herself, when all her relations had taken their departure. Before retracing her way to the fête, however, she had gone to pay a visit to the lunatic, who had slept the entire day under the guardianship of Chounette. Having entered softly into her chamber, she found her risen, and sitting upon the bed with an air pensive and almost calm. For the first time, for a long period, Rose ventured to touch her hand and ask her how she found herself; and for the first time, for a dozen years, the idiot did not withdraw her hand, nor turn away from the bed-side with ill humour.

"My dear sister—my good Bricoline!" repeated Rose, encouraged and joyful, "do you feel better?"

"I feel well," replied the idiot, in a quick voice. "On awakening I have found that which I have been looking for for the *last fifty-four years.*"

"And what have you been looking for, my dearest?"

"I have been looking for affection!" replied Bricoline, in a strange tone, and putting her finger upon her lips with a mysterious air; "I have looked everywhere—in the old château, in the garden, in the borders of the stream, in the hollow ways, and all over the warren. But it is not there, Rose, and you'll not find it yourself! It is shut up in a great subterranean place, which is under this house, and it will be found beneath the ruins. This information came to me while I was asleep—for while I am sleeping I am always thinking and looking. Be quiet, Rose, and leave me alone. This night—not later than this night—I shall find this affection, and I will give you a part of it. And then too we shall be rich! *Au jour d'aujourd'hui*, as that *gendarme* says that they have put here to guard us, we are so poor that nobody wishes for us. But to-morrow, Rose, not later than to-morrow, we shall both be married—I to Paul, who has become king of Algiers, and you to that man who carries the sacks of wheat, and who always looks at you so much. I shall make him my prime minister, and his employment shall be to burn that *gendarme* in a small fire, who is always saying the same thing over again, and who has made us suffer so much. But keep silence, and don't tell anybody. It is a great secret, and the fate of the African war depends upon it."

This strange sort of discourse very much alarmed Rose, and she dared not make her sister any reply, for fear of exciting her more and more. She would not leave her, until the doctor, whom they expected at that hour, had arrived, and she even forgot her desire to dance, and remained dejected at the bed-side of the idiot, her head hanging down, her hands crossed upon her knees, and her heart full of sorrowful tenderness. There was a striking contrast between the two sisters; the one so awfully emaciated by suffering—so repulsive in her self-abandonment; the other so much adorned—so brilliant in the bloom of her beauty: and yet there was a resemblance in their features. The hearts of both were oppressed, though in diffe-

rent degrees, with *une amour contrariée*, as they say in the country; both were grave and sorrowful. The least dejected of the two was, however, the idiot, who was revolving in her wandering mind strange hopes and fantastic projects.

The doctor arrived exactly at his time. He examined the idiot with the species of apathy which a man feels who has nothing to hope, and nothing to attempt, in a case long since considered desperate.

"The pulse is the same," said he; "she has undergone no alteration."

"Excuse me, doctor," said Rose, drawing him aside; "there is an alteration since last night. Her cries, her sleep, and her manner of speaking, are all different from her usual way. I assure you she is undergoing a revolution. To-night she has been endeavouring to collect and express her ideas, although they are the ideas of delirium. Is this a bad or a good symptom in her general state? What do you think?"

"I think nothing of it," replied the doctor. "People must expect all sorts of things in these maladies, but they can foresee nothing. Your family has done wrong in not having made the necessary sacrifices for sending your sister into one of the establishments where the professional men have especially devoted themselves to this peculiar class of cases. For my part, I have never boasted of being able to cure them, and I think even those most highly qualified cannot be answerable for a patient of this sort for a day together. It is too late now, the time has passed. All that I hope is, that her mania for silence and solitude may not degenerate into a state of fury. Avoid contradicting her, and do not make her speak, in order that her thoughts may not become fixed upon one single object."

"Alas!" said Rose, "I dare not contradict you, and yet it is fearful to live always alone, afraid of everybody! And now, when she seems at last to look for some sympathy, some pity, must we oppose to this craving of the affections an icy silence? Do you know what she said to me just now? She said that since the time that she has been mad (and she pretended that it was fifty-four years), she had been occupied in looking for affection."

"Poor girl! it is certain that she has found but little!"

"And did she say this in reasonable language?"

"Alas! no; she mingled it with frightful ideas, and terrible menaces."

"You see, then, that these effusions of her delirium are more dangerous than salutary. Trust me, it is better to leave her to herself; and, if she wishes to go out, put no restraint upon her usual habit. It is only in this way that we can prevent the crisis of last night from returning."

Rose obeyed with regret; but Marcelle, who desired to withdraw into her chamber to write, and who saw that her young friend was thoughtful and dejected, entreated her to go and amuse herself, and promised that at the first sound, or the first

symptom of agitation in her sister, she would send and warn her by the little Fanchon. Besides, Madame Bricolin was engaged in the house, and the grandmother pressed Rose to go with her, and dance another *bourrée* under her own eyes before the closing of the festival.

"You must think," said she, "that I count the fete-days now, and that every year I say to myself that perhaps I may never see the next. I must see you dance again, and enter into the amusement of the day, or else it will leave sorrowful thoughts upon my mind, and I shall picture to myself that it will bring me some misfortune."

Rose had not taken three steps upon the little hill before she found Grand-Louis at her side.

"Mademoiselle Rose," said he, "has your father been saying anything against me?"

"No. On the contrary, he almost ordered me this morning to dance with you."

"But—since this morning?"

"I have scarcely seen him: he has not spoken to me. He seems to be very much engrossed with business."

"Come, Grand-Louis," said the grandmother, "why don t you dance with Rose? Don't you see that she wishes it?"

"Is that true, Mamselle Rose?" said the Miller, taking the hand of the young girl. "Have you any fancy to dance with me again to-night?"

"I rather wish to dance," she replied, with a nonchalance rather provoking.

"If with any other rather than with me," said Grand-Louis, pressing Rose's arm against his own agitated heart: "tell me, that I may seek him."

"That is as much as to say, that you wish it may not be with you," replied the malicious girl, pausing in her way.

"You think so?" said the Miller, in a transport of love. "Ah, well! you shall see whether my limbs are benumbed."

And he hurried her, he almost carried her into the middle of the dance, where, in a moment's time, both of them had forgotten their vexations and anxieties, gliding lightly over the green turf, and clasping each other's hand a little more closely than the requirements of the *bourrée* altogether exacted.

But this intoxicating dance was not ended when M. Bricolin, who had watched the opportunity of making the affront he was about to offer, more marked, in the face of the whole village, rushed into the midst of the dancers, and stopped with a gesture the bagpipe-player, the sound of whose instrument would have drowned his voice.

"My child!" he exclaimed, seizing Rose's arm, "you are an honest and respectable girl, and you must never dance with people that you don't know."

"Mademoiselle Rose is dancing with me, M. Bricolin!" replied Grand-Louis, greatly excited.

"It is on that account that I forbid her, as I forbid you, to

your face, to take the liberty of asking her, or of ever speaking a word to her, or of ever entering my door, or ——"

The thundering voice of the farmer was stifled by this excess of eloquence, and his passion was making him stutter, when Grand-Louis stopped him.

"M. Bricolin," said he, "you have the rights of a father over your daughter, and the rights of a master over your own house to forbid me its entrance; but you have no right to offer me an insult in public, before you have given me an opportunity of private explanation."

"I have a right to do everything that I choose!" replied Bricolin, highly exasperated; "and I say to a worthless fellow all that I think of him."

"To whom do you say that, M. Bricolin?" demanded Grand-Louis, whose eyes flashed lightning, although he had said to himself at the commencement of that scene, "Now it comes! I have got what I deserve up to a certain point," although it was impossible for him patiently to support such an outrage.

"I say it to whoever I think fit," replied Bricolin, with a majestic air, though at the bottom he felt very suddenly intimidated.

"If you speak to your own cap, it is of little consequence," replied Grand-Louis, endeavouring to moderate his own indignation.

"Look at this madman!" replied M. Bricolin, drawing back into the crowd of curious auditors who were pressing round him. "Does not everybody see that he is insulting me, because I have forbidden him to speak to my daughter; and have I not the right?"

"Yes, yes! you have certainly the right," replied the Miller, forcing himself to retire, "but not without telling me the reason; and I shall require it from you when we are both in cooler blood."

"Do you threaten me, you pitiful fellow?" exclaimed Bricolin in alarm, and calling upon the crowd as witnesses. "He threatens me!" he added in an emphatic tone, as if to invoke the assistance of his neighbours and servants against a man so dangerous.

"God keep me from it, M. Bricolin!" said Grand-Louis, shrugging his shoulders; "you will not hear me ——"

"No; I will not hear you. I will hear nothing from a false and ungrateful friend. Yes," added he, observing that this reproach excited in the Miller more sorrow than passion, "I tell you that you are a false friend—a Judas!"

"A Judas? No, for I am not a Jew, M. Bricolin."

"I don't know that!" replied the farmer, who found the greatest courage when his adversary appeared the weakest.

"Ah, softly, if you please!" replied Grand-Louis, in a tone that at once silenced him. "No big words! I respect your age; I respect your mother and your daughter also, perhaps more than I respect yourself; but I will not answer for myself

if you go too far. I could easily retort upon you, and make you see that if I have done a little wrong you have done a great one. Let us both be silent. Believe me, M. Bricolin, we may be hurried on further than we wish to go. I shall come and speak to you, and you will hear me."

"You shall not come to my house! If you do come, I will turn you out with disgrace!" exclaimed M. Bricolin, when he saw that the Miller had got beyond the reach of hearing. "You are nothing but a pitiful fellow—a cheat, a swindler!"

Rose, who, pale and frozen with terror, had remained motionless on the arm of her father until that moment, was suddenly seized with an energetic impulse, of which she could not have believed herself capable a moment before.

"Father," said she, withdrawing him forcibly from the crowd, "you are in a passion, and you say that which you do not think. It is privately, in your family, that, if necessary, you should explain yourself, and not before all the world. What you are doing now is very injurious and disagreeable to me, and shows that you are not very anxious to make me be respected."

"You! you!" said the farmer, astonished and even subdued by the courage of his daughter. "There is nothing against you in all this—nothing that can make people bring you into the question. I allowed you to dance with that miserable fellow. I thought it nothing but what was natural and obliging, as everybody else would have believed it. I did not know then that that man was a scoundrel, a traitor, a ——"

"Anything you like, father, but that is sufficient," said Rose, clinging to his arm with the strength of a rebellious child.

And she succeeded in dragging him towards the farm.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TWO SISTERS.

MADAME BRICOLIN did not expect to see everybody return so soon. Her husband had consigned her to the house, and had left her without telling her of the outrage which he meditated. He did not wish that she should make her appearance, and lessen the effect of the majesty of the part he was about to play in public by her loud vociferations. Thus, when she saw him return crimson with passion, out of breath, muttering to himself, and dragging Rose upon his arm, very much excited but very much dejected also, with great tears in her eyes which she was unable to repress, while her grandmother followed them,

clasping her hands together with an air of consternation, she recoiled with surprise at first, but afterwards raised her candle to look them more searchingly in the face.

"What is the matter?" said she; "what has happened?"

"The matter is, that my son has done very wrong, and that he talks irrationally," said the grandmother, dropping into a chair.

"Yes, yes! that is the burden of the song," said the farmer, who at the sight of his better-half gave up a part of his passion. But we have had chattering enough. Is the supper ready? Come, Rose, are you hungry?"

"No, father," replied Rose, shortly.

"Have I taken away your appetite?"

"Yes, father."

"Do you mean this as a reproach, then?"

"Yes, father, I confess it."

"Ah! you say so—do you then, Rose?" replied the farmer, who condescended to his daughter as much as was possible with him, but for the first time, saw her a little disposed to revolt against him. "You take upon yourself to speak in a way that will not do for me. Do you know that your ill-humour makes me suspect you of something that I hope you would not wish me to think."

"Speak! speak! father. Say what you think. If you are mistaken, it is my duty to justify myself."

"I say, daughter, that you will get but poor thanks for taking the part of a clown of a Miller, on whose shoulders I will break my cane one of these fine mornings, if he comes roaming round my house."

"Father," replied Rose, with warmth, "I dare tell you myself, even though you should break your cane over my own shoulders, that all this is cruel and unjust, and that you have disgraced me, in making me serve as the occasion of your taking a public revenge, as if I were responsible for the injuries which may, or may not, have been done towards you; while at least all this inflicts great pain upon me, and wounds my grandmother, as you may plainly see."

"Yes, yes; I am both vexed and grieved," said the Grandmother Bricolin in her frank, free tone, which, however, concealed great softness and goodness of heart (and in this Rose resembled her, having both quickness of speech and tenderness of soul). "It wounds me to the heart," continued the old woman, "to see an honest youth so ill-treated and abused, that I love almost as well as one of my own children, and the more so that I have been friends with his mother for more than sixty years, and with all his family—a family of good people: yes! and to whom Grand-Louis will never bring disgrace."

"Oh! and is it then on account of this handsome gentleman that your mother is grumbling?" said Madame Bricolin to her husband, "and that your daughter is crying? Look at her

there!—all in tears! Ay, indeed! you have got into a pretty business, M. Bricolin, with your friendship for that great ass! Now you see what reward you have got! I declare it is a shame to see your mother and your daughter take his part against you, overflowing with tears, as if—as if——. No; I will not say another word! I blush for them!"

"Say everything that you think, mother!" exclaimed Rose, now truly irritated. "Since everything has been so well contrived to humiliate me to-day, why stop at anything? I am quite ready to answer seriously and sincerely, if I am questioned upon my feelings for Grand-Louis."

"And what are your sentiments, mademoiselle?" said the farmer, violently irritated. "Tell us that quickly, if you please, since your tongue seems to itch to do so!"

"My feelings are those of a sister and a friend," replied Rose, "and nobody shall make me change them."

"A sister! the sister of a miller!" said M. Bricolin, sneering and imitating Rose's voice. "A friend! the friend of a peasant! Here is fine language, and very proper language for a girl like you! Thunder strike me if *au jour d'aujourd'hui* the young girls are not all mad. Rose, you talk as they would talk in the mad-houses."

At this moment piercing cries burst from the chamber of the maniac. Madame Bricolin trembled, and Rose grew pale as death.

"Listen, father!" said she, sharply seizing M. Bricolin's arm. "Listen attentively, and dare not to laugh again at the madness of young girls. Jesting about these mad-houses, you only seem to forget that a girl of *our rank* may so yield to her passion, for a man without fortune, as to fall into a state worse than death!"

"Thus, then, she avows it! she proclaims it!" exclaimed Madame Bricolin, divided between rage and despair. "She loves this clown, and she threatens us with turning like her sister!"

"Rose! Rose!" said M. Bricolin, terrified, "be silent; and you, Thibaude, go and look after Bricoline," he added, in an imperious tone.

Madame Bricolin withdrew. Rose remained standing, her countenance bewildered, herself affrighted at what she had been saying to her father.

"My daughter, you are ill," said M. Bricolin, with emotion. "You must return to your senses."

"You are right, father; I am ill!" said Rose, melting into tears, and throwing herself into her father's arms.

M. Bricolin had been alarmed, but it was impossible for him to soften into tenderness. He embraced Rose as a child who was to be pacified, not as a daughter who was to be tenderly loved. He was vain of her beauty, her understanding, and still more of the riches with which he could endow her. He would have preferred to have seen her established in the world

senseless and ugly, but inspiring envy from her wealth, rather than poor and perfect, and inspiring pity.

"Child," said he, "you have not common sense to-night. Go to bed, and turn this miller and your fine friendship out of your head together. It is true that his sister nursed you, but, *parbleu!* she has been well paid. It is true, too, that this youth has been the companion of your childhood, but he was our servant, and he only did his duty in amusing you. If it please me to drive him away *au jour d'aujourd'hui*, because he has played me a villanous trick, it is your duty to believe that I am right."

"Oh, father!" said Rose, weeping and still in the farmer's arms, "you will revoke this command. You will permit him to justify himself, for he is not guilty; that is impossible, and you would not compel me to insult the friend of my infancy and the son of his good mother, who loves me so much."

"Rose, all this begins to tire me extremely," replied Bricolin, shaking off the caresses of his child. "It is too ridiculous for us to make a family quarrel of the expulsion of this knave! Come, pray let us have peace. Listen to your poor sister's bawling, and don't think so much about a stranger, when we have such trouble in the house already."

"Oh! if you think that I do not hear my sister's voice," said Rose, with a fearful expression of countenance; "if you think that her cries say nothing to my soul, you deceive yourself, father. I hear her, and I think too."

Rose went tottering out of the room, but as she went towards her sister's chamber they heard her fall upon the floor of the corridor. The two dames Bricolin ran to her in alarm. Rose had fallen into a swoon that resembled death.

Rose was hastily carried into the apartment where Marcelle was occupied in writing while awaiting her return, without for a moment suspecting the storm that had burst over her poor friend. She lavished on her the most tender cares, and it was she alone who had the presence of mind to send into the village to ascertain whether the doctor had yet departed. He came, and found the young girl in a state of catalepsy. Her limbs were stiffened, her teeth closed, her lips livid. Consciousness returned after the application of some of his prescriptions, but her pulse passed from the frightful lethargy of inaction to a rate of the wildest rapidity. Fever burned in her large black eyes, and she talked wildly without knowing of what. Struck with hearing the name of Grand-Louis repeatedly and tenderly pronounced, Marcelle succeeded in withdrawing her alarmed relatives from the chamber and remained with her alone, while the doctor transferred himself to that of Mademoiselle Bricolin the elder, who began to show some symptoms of the return of the fury of the preceding night.

"My dear Rose," said Marcelle, pressing her young companion in her arms, "you are in trouble, and that is the cause of your illness. Compose yourself; to-morrow you shall con-

fide everything to me, and I will do everything that is possible to remove your grief. Who knows but I may be able to find the means!"

"Ah, you are an angel!" replied Rose, throwing herself upon her bosom; "but you can do nothing for me! All is lost! all is torn away! Louis is turned out of the house: my father, who sanctioned him this morning, hates him to-night. Indeed I am very unhappy!"

"You love him, then!" said Marcelle, in astonishment.

"Do I love him?" exclaimed Rose. "Can I help loving him? How can you doubt it?"

"Last night, Rose, you did not admit it"

"Perhaps I did not; and perhaps I never should have done so if they had not persecuted him, and if I had not been driven to extremity, as I have been to-day. Think," said she, speaking with impetuosity, and pressing both her hands upon her burning brow, "that they should have endeavoured to humble him before me, to disgrace him in my eyes, because he is poor and dares to love me. This morning, when they heaped ridicule upon him, I was cowardly. I felt angry, but I dared not show it. I suffered him to be vilified without dreaming of defending him, and I almost blushed for him. When I came home, seized so suddenly with that violent pain in my head, I asked myself if I should have the fortitude to encounter so many insults for his sake. I figured to myself that I would no longer love him; and then it seemed to me that I must die; that this house, which has always looked so beautiful in my eyes, because I have been brought up in it, and have always found myself so happy in it, became dismal, disagreeable, sorrowful, and ugly, as it must, without doubt, appear to you. I imagined myself in a prison; and to-night, when my poor sister said to me, in her madness, that our father was a gendarme, who kept watch over us to make us suffer, there was a moment when I myself was mad also, in which I pictured to myself that I beheld all that my sister saw. Oh! it was that which has made me ill. And when I returned to reason, I felt that without my poor Louis there was for me nothing agreeable, nothing endurable in life. It was because I love him that I have until this day so cheerfully borne all my troubles, the terrible temper of my mother, the insensibility of my father, the burden of our wealth, which only makes us unhappy and excites the jealousy of those around us, and the spectacle of the frightful maladies of my sister and my grandfather, which have been daily before my eyes for so long a time. All this appears to me hideous when I view it alone —daring to love no more, and forced to submit to everything, without the consolation of being adored by a being, handsome, noble, excellent—whose attachment recompenses me for all. Oh! it is impossible! I love him, and I will never again attempt to cure myself of this passion. But I shall die, as you will see, Madame Marcelle; for they have

driven him away, and I shall have much to suffer, for they are pitiless. I can never see him again; for, if I spoke to him in secret, they would scold and ridicule me until they would turn my head, my poor head, which I believed to be so sound, so strong, and which now is so distracted with pain that it seems as if it would split. Oh! I would not leave myself to grow like my sister; have no fear of that kind for me, my dear Madame Marcelle! I would sooner kill myself if I felt this malady gaining upon me. But it is not gaining upon me; it is not, indeed! Yet, when I hear her cry it breaks my heart, and my blood changes from fire to ice. Ah, sister! poor sister! we have the same blood within us, and we participate in one disorder, in our bodies the same as in our souls. Oh, heaven, madam! oh, heaven! do you hear her? Stay! they have shut the doors close, but I hear her still; I hear her always! How she suffers! how she loves! how she screams! My sister! oh, my poor friend! that used to be so beautiful, so sensible, so gentle, so cheerful! and who now howls like a wolf——"

Poor Rose burst into sobs, and gradually these tears, which had been a long time suppressed by a violent effort of determination, changed first into inarticulate cries, but afterwards into piercing shrieks. Her countenance changed, her eyes rolled, so that now the white and now the pupil seemed lost. She almost squeezed Marcelle's arms to breaking with the violent pressure of her hands; and she finished by hiding her face in her pillow and shrieking in a distracting manner, imitating, by an irresistible instinct, the fearful cries of her unhappy sister.

The family, struck by that ill-boding echo, quitted the elder to hasten to the younger sister. The doctor hastened also; and, knowing what had passed, did not attribute this violent attack of the nerves merely to the impression produced upon the imagination of Rose by the insanity of her elder sister. He succeeded in calming her; but when he found himself again alone with the Bricolins, he spoke to them with much severity.

"You have committed a great imprudence," he said to them, "in bringing this young girl up within sight of such a sorrowful spectacle. It will be well if you can avert the evil by sending the elder sister to a lunatic asylum, and by marrying the younger to dissipate the melancholy which is now overcoming her."

"What! M. Lavergne; but certainly," said Madame Bricolin, "our only desire is to see her married. She has had no less than ten opportunities; and even to-day we have had her cousin Honoré here, who would be a very suitable match, for he will some day have a hundred thousand crowns. If she would have him he would desire nothing better, and neither should we; but she will not even hear it spoken of, and she has refused everybody that we have proposed to her."

"Perhaps that is because you have not proposed him who pleased her," replied the doctor. "I know nothing about it, and I never meddle with your affairs; but you are perfectly aware of the cause of the misfortune of the other, and I strongly advise you to manage differently with this last."

"Oh! this last," said M. Bricolin; "that would be too great a pity. She is such a beautiful girl; is she not, doctor?"

"The other also was a beautiful girl, if you remember."

"In short, sir," said Madame Bricolin, more irritated than convinced by the frankness of the doctor, "do you believe that my daughter will not retain her senses? The misfortune of the other is an accident caused by grief for the death of her lover."

"But you had not given your permission for their marriage."

"Sir, you know nothing about it: we might perhaps have allowed them to marry if we had known that the disappointment would have made her so ill. But Rose, sir, is a girl of a stronger constitution, very reasonable; and, God be thanked, this malady is not hereditary with us. There has never been a lunatic, that I know of, either in the family of the Bricolins or in that of the Thibauds. For my own part, my head has always been both cool and strong: I have other children who are like me, and I cannot conceive any reason why Rose should not be as sane as the rest."

"You may think as you please," replied the doctor, "but I assure you that you will play a very losing game if you ever thwart the inclinations of your youngest daughter. She possesses a nervous temperament, easily acted upon, and greatly resembling that of her eldest sister. And, still further, if insanity is not hereditary, it is contagious——"

"Oh! we will send the other to an asylum; we have decided upon that, whatever it may cost," said Madame Bricolin.

"And nobody must contradict Rose; do you hear, wife?" said the farmer, filling his glass brimfull of wine, for the sake of deadening his sense of his domestic annoyances. "There are some actors at Châtre, and we must take her to see a comedy. We will buy her a new dress; two, if necessary. Luckily we have the means to obtain her anything."

M. Bricolin was interrupted by Madame de Blanchemont, who came to demand a private interview.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE AGREEMENT.

"M. BRICOLIN," said Marcelle, following the farmer into a sort of dark and ill-arranged closet, where he kept his papers piled up in the utmost confusion, together with various implements of agriculture and samples of seeds, "are you disposed to listen to me with calmness and gentleness?"

The farmer had drunk very freely to give himself courage, before he went to the little hill to insult Grand-Louis. On returning he had drunk still more to calm and refresh himself; and in the third place, he had drunk to charm away the sorrows which were gathering around him, and to chase away the gloomy thoughts which were gaining ground upon him. His china pitcher ornamented with its blue flowers, was always standing upon the kitchen table, and usually served to sustain his spirits, or to stimulate them against the first heaviness of intoxication. And when he found himself alone with Madame de Blanchemont, and deprived of the support of his white wine, he felt himself ill at ease, and mechanically made a movement to search upon his writing-table for a glass, which he could not find; and, in attempting to offer her a chair, he threw two down. Marcelle then perceived that his legs, his flushed face, his language, and his brain, were all equally under the influence of intoxication; and, notwithstanding the disgust which he had inspired, and which she felt redoubling towards him, she resolved to compel him to enter into a free explanation with her, recalling to her mind the proverb, *in vino veritas.*

Perceiving that he had scarcely heard her first words, she renewed the assault.

"M. Bricolin," she said to him, "I have had the pleasure of asking you if you are disposed to listen with kindness and calmness to a request of a rather delicate nature which I wish to make."

"What is it, madam?" replied the farmer, in no very gracious tone, but without seeming ruffled.

He was much displeased with Marcelle, but was too lethargic to indulge in the expression of his feelings.

"It is, M. Bricolin," replied she, "that you have driven the Miller of Angibault away from your house, and that I desire to know the cause of your dissatisfaction with him."

Bricolin was puzzled at the frankness of manner with which she opened the question. There was in Marcelle's demeanour a courageous sincerity which always made him feel uneasy,

and still more so at a time when he had not the free use of his faculties. Controlled as if by a will superior to his own, he did the contrary to what he would have done had he been sober—he spoke the truth.

"You know, madam," he replied, "the cause of my discontent; I have no occasion to tell you."

"Am I, then, the cause?" said Madame de Blanchemont.

"You? No; I don't accuse you. You are consulting your own interest; that is quite right, and just as I am doing by mine But I look upon it as the action of a low fellow to pretend to be my friend, and all the while to be giving you treacherous advice against me. Listen to it, profit by it, pay for it, and it will not fail you. But, on my side, I shall show my door to the enemy who takes your part to my injury. That is it. All the worse for those who don't like it. I am the master of my own house; for, look you, Madame de Blanchemont, I say to you, everybody for himself! Your interests are your own interests to you, and my interests are my own interests to me The rabble is of the rabble—*au jour d'aujourd'hui*, everybody thinks for himself. I am the master of my own house, and of my own family, you have your interests just as I have mine; as for advice against me, you will easily enough get that, I tell you."

And M. Bricolin continued to go on in this manner for about ten minutes, pertinaciously repeating his own words, losing at every word the remembrance of having said the same thing a hundred times before.

Marcelle, who had seldom been in any close vicinity with an intoxicated person, and who had never had any conversation with one, listened to him with astonishment, and asked herself if he had been suddenly turned into an idiot; thinking with alarm that the fate of Rose and of her lover depended upon a man harsh and self-opiniated when he was sober, and stupid and heavy when wine modified his roughness. She suffered him for a time to repeat by rote the same low commonplaces; but seeing that this would certainly last until he fell asleep in his chair, she endeavoured to procure a digression by abruptly touching the chord on which he was most sensitive.

"Let me see, M. Bricolin," said she, interrupting him: "you really wish to buy Blanchemont, and if I were to accept the price which you offer me, would you still be angry?"

Bricolin made an effort to raise his eyelids, to look at Marcelle, who, on her side, regarded him with a fixed and self-assured attention. By degrees the eyes of the farmer brightened, his heavy and puffed-up face settled into a more calm expression, and it might have been said that a veil had fallen from his countenance. He rose and took two or three turns in the chamber, as if to try his legs and recal his scattered thoughts. When he returned and resumed his seat opposite to Marcelle, his demeanour was determined, and his complexion almost pale.

"Excuse me, Madame la Baronne," said he; "what have you done me the honour to say to me?"

"I say," replied Marcelle, "that if I may be willing to let you have my land for two hundred and fifty thousand francs; if ——"

"If what?" demanded Bricolin in a quick tone, and with the look of a lynx.

"If you will promise me not to make your daughter unhappy."

"My daughter! What has my daughter to do with all this?"

"Your daughter loves the Miller of Angibault. She is very ill, and may perhaps lose her senses like her sister. Do you hear? do you understand, M. Bricolin?"

"I hear, but I understand very little. I see very clearly that my daughter has got some sort of love affair into her head; that may pass off some day or another just as it came. But what great interest can you have in my daughter?"

"Of what importance is that to you? Though you cannot comprehend how any one can feel friendship, or have compassion for a charming girl who is in grief, you can at least comprehend the advantage of being the proprietor of Blanchemont."

"This is only a jest, Madame la Baronne. You are laughing at me. You have been talking to-day with my greatest enemy, that Tailland the notary, who must certainly have advised you to hold to a high price for your sugar-plum."

"Without so much animosity against you as you seem to suppose, he has given me the instructions necessary to my position. Therefore I know that I shall be able to find a purchaser very soon, and, as you say, sell my sugar-plum at a high price."

"And it was the Miller of Angibault who procured you this good adviser, concealing it all the while from me."

"How can you know anything about it? Perhaps you deceive yourself. Besides, all explanation on this subject is useless. Supposing I were to content myself with your offer, the rest is no affair of yours."

"But that rest—that rest is this, that my daughter must marry a miller."

"Your father was one before he became a farmer under my relations."

"But he had accumulated a good deal of money, and *au jour d'aujourd'hui*, I am in a position to have a son-in-law who may be able to help me to buy your estate."

"To purchase it at the price of three hundred thousand francs, and perhaps more?"

"Is that a *sinet quoi nomme?* You wish that this Miller should marry my daughter? What interest can you have in that?"

"I have told you, friendship, and the pleasure of making

others happy—both things which appear strange to you; but every one according to his own taste."

"I know very well that your late husband, M. le Baron, would have given ten thousand francs for a bad horse, or forty thousand francs for anything else, whenever it came into his head. These are the fancies of a man of rank, but that may be easily understood: it was for himself, and for his own pleasures; instead of for making a sacrifice purely to give pleasure to others, to people who have no right to expect anything from you, and whom you scarcely know ——"

"Then you advise me not to make this sacrifice?"

"I advise you!" exclaimed Bricolin energetically, alarmed at his own impolitic mistake—"I advise you to do whatever you like. There is no disputing tastes and opinions; only ——"

"Only you distrust me, that is plain. You do not think me sincere in my proposals?"

"*Dame!* Madam, what guarantee shall I have for it? It is the whim of a queen, which, perhaps, may pass away the next moment."

"On that very account you ought to make haste, and take me at my word."

"Faith, she is right!" said M. Bricolin to himself: "with all her folly, she has more coolness than I have."

"Come, Madame la Baronne," said he, "what guarantee will you give me?"

"A written engagement."

"Signed?"

"Certainly."

"And on my side, I am to promise you to give my daughter in marriage to your *protégé?*"

"You must, in the first place, give me your word of honour."

"My word of honour, and after that?"

"Immediately after having done so, you shall, in the presence of your mother, your wife, and in mine, give your consent to Rose.

"My word of honour? Rose, then, is in love with one who is beneath her?"

"Only say whether you agree to this?"

"If there is nothing but this to make the child happy ——"

"There is still more wanting."

"What more?"

"That you should keep your word."

The farmer's countenance changed.

"Keep my word!—keep my word!" said he. "Do you doubt it then?"

"No more than you doubt mine. But, as you demand a written engagement from me, I must demand a written engagement from you also."

"A written engagement, to what purpose?"

"A promise of marriage which I shall write out, which Rose shall sign, and which you shall sign."

"And if Rose should demand a fortune after all this?"

"She will renounce it in that very engagement."

"That would be a famous piece of economy!" thought the farmer. "That plague of a portion, which I should have to furnish her with some day or another, might have hindered me from buying Blanchemont. Not to portion her, and to have Blanchemont for two hundred and fifty thousand francs, that leaves a profit of a hundred thousand francs. Come—there is no room for haggling. In addition to all this, if Rose went out of her mind, I should have to give up all thoughts of finding a son-in-law. And then—and then there is paying a doctor every year. And then, again, it is too melancholy; it would be too painful for me to see her become ugly and disgusting, like her sister. It would be a disgrace to us to have two daughters mad. This will be a ridiculous match for Rose, but then the lordship of Blanchemont will make everything smooth. If we are found fault with on one side, we shall be envied on the other. Come, be a good father. This is not such a bad business."

"Madame la Baronne," said he, "suppose we see how we may be able to draw up this engagement; yet, for all that, it is a ludicrous bargain, and I have never seen one that might serve as its pattern."

"Neither have I," replied Madame de Blanchemont; "and I know not whether such a thing exists in modern legislation. But of what consequence is that? With good sense and rectitude you know that we can draw up an engagement more solid than all those executed by professional people."

"That may be seen every day: a will, for example. Even stamped paper is of no consequence. But I have got some here. I always have some by me. People ought always to have it ready at hand."

"Allow me to make a rough copy on plain paper, M. Bricolin, make one yourself also, and we will compare them, and discuss them if we find any occasion, and then transcribe them upon the stamped paper."

"Do it, do it, madam," replied Bricolin, who scarcely knew how to write; "you are better able than I am; you can express it better than I can do; and when you have done we will examine it."

While Marcelle was writing, M. Bricolin looked in a corner of the room for a pitcher of water, and, without being perceived, placed it on an angle, and, stooping down, swallowed a tolerable quantity.

"Having one's senses is the question," thought he; "I feel as if mine had returned; cold water to cool the blood is very good in matters of business, because it renders us prudent and cautious."

Marcelle, inspired by her heart, and gifted besides with great

clearness of understanding in carrying these generous resolutions into effect, drew up an agreement which a lawyer might have considered as a masterpiece in perspicacity, though it was written in good French, though it did not contain one of the customary technical words, and was marked by admirable good faith. When Bricolin had listened to its perusal, he was struck with the precision of a deed which he could not have dictated, but of which he perfectly comprehended the value and the consequences.

"Plague be with the women!" thought he; "people have cause enough to say, when by chance they do understand business, that they show more sharpness than the most cunning among us. I well know that when I consult my own wife: she always finds out an open door, either in my favour or to my injury. I wish she were here; but she would stop us by her objections. We shall see better how things are when the question of signing comes. Who would, however, have believed that this young lady here, who is a reader of romances and a hot-brained republican, would be able to commit a folly so wisely? I shall have my head turned with astonishment. Let me drink another glass of water. Pah! that is disagreeable. How much good wine must I drink after this bargain to refresh my stomach!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE AFTER-THOUGHT.

"This appears to me unobjectionable," said M. Bricolin, when he had listened to a second and a third reading of the deed, all the time following with his eyes, which opened wider, and grew brighter at each line, the text which Marcelle held between the two. "There is but one little thing that I find fault with: that is the price, Madame Marcelle; truly it is too dear by twenty thousand francs. I did not at first reflect what injury this marriage of my daughter with the Miller would do me. Everybody will say that I am ruined, since I settle her in such a miserable way. It will take away my credit; and, besides, this fellow does not possess enough to buy the wedding presents. That will be an expense of eight or ten thousand francs, which will fall to my share. Rose cannot manage without a handsome *trousseau;* I am sure she will hold to that."

"I am sure myself that she will desire nothing," said Marcelle. "Listen, M. Bricolin!—she is weeping. Do you hear her?"

"I do not hear her, madam. I believe that you deceive yourself."

"I do not deceive myself," said Marcelle, opening the door. "She suffers, she sobs, and her sister shrieks. How can you hesitate, sir? You have found the means of enriching yourself, and restoring her health, her reason, and perhaps her life; and, in such a moment as this you imagine that you may still gain something more by making a better bargain. Truly," added she, with indignation, "you are not a man—you have not the heart of a man! Take care that I do not think better of this, and that I do not abandon you to the calamities which are weighing down your family as a punishment for your avarice."

The farmer understood no part of this vehement outbreak distinctly but the menace to break off the bargain.

"Come, madam," said he, "give up ten thousand francs, and we will close the bargain!"

"Adieu!" said Marcelle; "I am going to see Rose. You can make your own reflections on this affair—mine are already made. I will not agree to the least change in my conditions. I have a son, and in thinking of others, I do not forget that I ought not to sacrifice him."

"Sit down again, Madame Marcelle, and leave poor Rose to sleep on. She is so very ill!"

"Go and see her yourself, then," said Marcelle, with warmth; "you will then convince yourself that she is not sleeping. Perhaps her sufferings may make you remember that you are her father."

"I do remember it," replied Bricolin, alarmed at the thought that Marcelle might change her intentions if he gave her time for reflection. "Come, madam, let us put the finish to this deed, and then we can carry the news to Rose and restore her to health."

"I hope, sir, that you will give your consent naturally and simply, and that she may never know that I have bought it of you."

"You do not wish that she should know that this is a condition between us? I will arrange that. Then it will be useless for her to sign the agreement."

"Excuse me—she can sign it without quite understanding it. This will be a species of wedding portion with which I shall have endowed her intended husband."

"That comes to the same thing. It is all the same to me. Rose has sense enough to understand that I would not marry her so stupidly without making her derive some advantage from it in the future. But the payment, Madame Marcelle? do you exact it in ready money?"

"You told me that you were provided."

"Without doubt I am. I have just been selling a large farm which was too far off for my own superintendence, and for which I received the whole purchase-money eight days ago—a thing which is seldom done in our neighbourhood; but it was a great nobleman who bought it of me, and such people are ex-

pected to have full purses. It is a peer of France, M. le Duc de ——, who wished to make a park of my land and improve his estate. My property suited him, and I sold it on good terms, as I had a right to do."

"That is of no consequence; you have the money by you?"

"I have it in my pocket-book in beautiful bank-notes," said Bricolin, lowering his voice. "I will let you see them, that you may not have any anxiety on that account."

And, after having bolted the doors, he drew from his girdle a large pocket-book of greasy and shining leather, in which was packed up a quantity of notes of the Bank of France. Astonished by the air of indifference with which Marcelle counted them:

"Oh!" said he, "it makes me tremble to have so much money as that in my possession at one time. Fortunately there are no more *chauffeurs* now, and we may venture upon taking care of a sum like this for some days without placing it out. I carry this all the day upon my person, and at night I put it under my pillow and sleep upon it. I long so much to be disencumbered of its care. If I had not settled this business with you at once I should have bought an iron coffer to shut it up in, while waiting for an opportunity of investing it; for as to confiding it to the care of bankers or attorneys, I am not so stupid as to do that. Thus I wish we could conclude our bargain to-night, in order that I might not have to protect this treasure any longer."

"I also wish that we could conclude it immediately," said Marcelle.

"What! without consulting anybody? Not even my wife or my lawyer?"

"Your wife is here; then, as for your lawyer, if you send for yours I must send for mine also."

"Those infernal lawyers spoil everything, believe me, madam. I know quite as well as they do, and you know, too, that our agreement is good; and if we have it registered it will be extremely expensive."

"Let us omit that formality. I will sell to you, as they say, from hand to hand."

"So important a bargain! That is enough to make one tremble, though. But this is nothing but a promise after all, even if we sign it."

"It is a promise which must be acted upon. I am ready to sign it. Go and seek your wife."

"That must certainly be done," said Bricolin to himself, "provided that doing so does not take up too much time, and that the wind does not change during the hour's dispute which I may perhaps have with Thibaude. Will you go and see Rose, Madame Marcelle? Only tell her nothing of this for the present."

"I will guard myself carefully. But you must permit me to give her some glimpses of hope of your consent."

"At the point where we now are that may be allowed," replied Bricolin, sagaciously bethinking himself that the sight of Rose and of her tears would be the best means of binding Marcelle to these generous intentions.

M. Bricolin found his wife in a very different tone of mind from what he had expected. Madame Bricolin was harsh and peevish; but, while more avaricious than her husband in the details of life, she had, upon the whole, less cupidity in her disposition. More bitter in words, more unfeeling in aspect, she was yet, upon occasion, more capable of a generous emotion. Besides, she was a woman, and her feelings as a mother, though concealed under the sourness of her appearance, were not the less warm in her bosom.

"M. Bricolin," said she, as she came to meet him in the kitchen, where one solitary candle was burning feebly, "you see me in trouble. Rose is worse than you think. She does nothing but shriek and weep, as if she had lost her senses. She loves this miller: it is a punishment sent from heaven for our sins. But the evil is done; her affections are involved, and she is just like her sister when her mind first began to wander. On the other hand, Bricoline is becoming every moment worse, and her state threatens to become intolerable. The doctor, seeing that she was bent upon breaking through the doors, came and compelled us to let her go out and ramble in the warren and the old château in her usual way. He says that she is accustomed to be alone and always in motion, and if she is shut up with people round her she will become furious. But I tremble lest she should kill herself. To-night she seems so dangerous. She, who never speaks, has told us all the horrors of her life. She has affected me so much that it has made me quite ill. It is intolerable to lead such a life as this; and when one thinks that being crossed in love is the cause! We have, however, brought up all our daughters equally well. The others married according to our wishes; they do us credit, they are rich, and they are disposed to think themselves happy, though their husbands are not very kind-hearted. But the eldest and the youngest are both of them of a strangely obstinate disposition; and since we have had the misfortune not to understand what might make us lose the one, we ought to have the prudence not to contradict the other. I would rather that she had never been born than that she should marry this miller! But she is determined; and as I would rather see her dead than mad, it is necessary that we should arrive at some determination. I tell you, then, M. Bricolin, I give my consent, and it is necessary that you should give yours also. I have just been saying to Rose, that if she will absolutely marry this man I shall not prevent her. That has appeared to calm her, though she looked as if she either did not understand me or did not believe me. You must go to her yourself and tell her the same thing."

"Just as I would have it!" exclaimed Bricolin, enchanted.

"Hold, wife! read me this little bit of an agreement, and tell me if anything has escaped me."

"I am lost in wonder!" said the farmer's wife, after having read the document.

And after innumerable exclamations she collected all her presence of mind, for the sake of reading it over again with all the attention of an attorney.

"This agreement is greatly in your favour," said she. "It must be quite valid. You have no need of consultation, M. Bricolin; you have only to get it signed. This is all profit, all satisfactory. It not only makes our fortune, but will make Rose satisfied, in her own way, as well. People are right in saying that Providence always rewards a good intention. I had decided upon bestowing her upon her lover for nothing, and see how well we are paid for doing so! Sign, sign, my old man, and pay the money at once! That will be confirming the agreement, and making it impossible to be recalled."

"Pay already! Do such a serious thing all in a moment! Act on a rag of paper which has not even been examined!"

"Pay, I tell you, and cause the banns to be published to-morrow morning."

"But if the child could only be made to listen to reason! Perhaps she may be better to-morrow, and consent to marry somebody else if she were reasoned with, and if you knew what tone to take with her. It might be said afterwards that an agreement like this was an act of folly, a piece of stupidity of my own, which could not be binding on my daughter."

"Ah! well then; the sale also would be set aside."

"How do you know that? We can always go to law."

"You would lose."

"Again, how do you know that? Besides, how would that affect us? The sale would be suspended. A lawsuit can be made to last a long time. You know that Madame de Blanchemont cannot wait, and that would force her into some arrangement."

"Bah! with such tales as these spread about, people would soon say all sorts of things against you, M. Bricolin. You would lose your credit and your character. It is always the the most profitable to act fairly."

"Ah! well, we shall see, Thibaude. Go at once and tell your girl that all is concluded. Perhaps, when she feels that she is no longer opposed, she will not be so very anxious about her Grand-Louis; for, honestly speaking, all this looks like a pique between her and me which has got into her head. But I say, though—this miller has not manœuvred all this so very ill. He has found the means of currying the favour and gaining the protection of this lady, I don't know how —— the fellow is no fool!"

"I shall detest him all my life!" replied the farmer's wife; "but that is all the same. Provided that Rose does not fall

into the same state as her sister, I can look coldly on her husband and hold my tongue."

"Oh! her husband! her husband!—he is not her husband yet!"

"It will be better to finish the business. Go and sign."

"And you? It is necessary that you should sign also."

"I am ready."

Madame Bricolin deliberately entered her daughter's chamber, where Marcelle awaited her, and, together with her husband, signed the agreement on the corner of a chest of drawers.

When this was done, Bricolin said in a low voice to his wife, with a look of ferocious triumph—

"Thibaude, the sale is good, and the conditions are void. You did not know that, though you pretend to know everything."

Rose was still suffering from fear and intolerable pains in the head, though, since the lunatic had left the house and her shrieks were no longer heard, she had become somewhat calmer. When Marcelle had affixed her signature to the agreement, and presented the pen to her young friend, she had great difficulty in comprehending what business was being transacted; but when she really understood it, she melted into tears, and throwing herself, with great emotion, into the arms of her father, her mother, and her friend, she whispered in the ear of the last—

"Divine Marcelle! this is a loan which I accept; I shall be rich enough some day to repay your son."

The grandmother Bricolin was the only person in the family who comprehended the noble conduct of Marcelle. She threw herself at her knees, and embraced them without uttering a word.

"And now," said Marcelle, in a low voice to the old woman, "it is not very late; it is only ten o'clock. Perhaps Grand-Louis may still be on the little hill, and besides, it is not so very far from here to Angibault. I wish any one could be sent to look for him. I dare not propose it, but it might be managed for him to come as if by chance, and once here, he might be informed of his happiness."

"I will charge myself with that," exclaimed the old woman. "If it be necessary, I will go myself to the mill; I shall find my legs of fifteen for that."

In fact, she herself went into the village, but could not find the Miller. She wished to despatch one of the farming-men to him, but they were all intoxicated, in their beds, or at the *cabaret*, incapable of moving. Little Fanchon was too timid to go alone on the roads at night, and besides, it would have been inhuman to expose so young a girl on the night of the fête to the chance of meeting every sort of person. The grandmother Bricolin was going to look still farther on

the hill, which was now almost deserted, for some one sufficiently mature and sufficiently prudent to execute the commission, when uncle Cadoche, coming from under the church porch, where he had been muttering a last prayer, offered himself to her notice.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PATACHON.

"You walk very late, Madame Bricolin," said the mendicant to the old farmer's wife. "You seem as if you were looking for somebody. Your grand-daughter has returned home a long time since. Her father has crossed her finely to-day."

"No matter, no matter, Cadoche," replied the old woman; "I have no money with me, but I believe they gave you something at our place to-day."

"I do not ask you for anything; my day's work is done. I have drunk three little glasses to-night, and I only walk the steadier. Hold! mother Bricolin, neither your husband, nor even your son, that great gentleman, can carry drink as I do at my age. I wish you a good-night. I am going to sleep at Angibault."

"At Angibault! Cadoche, my old man, are you going to Angibault?"

"Does that surprise you? My house is two long leagues from here on the side of the Jeu-lez-Bois, and I do not want to fatigue myself. I can pass the night at the house of my nephew the Miller. I am always well received there, and they do not put me upon straw as they do in some houses—with you, for instance, who are still rich enough, notwithstanding the *chauffeurs*. At my nephew's there is always a bed ready for me in the mill, and they are not afraid that I should set it on fire, as they are with you there, where, if they have no fire for the feet, they have it in the head."

These allusions to that catastrophe of which her husband had been the victim sent a shudder through the aged blood of Madame Bricolin. But she made an effort to think only of her grand-daughter, and of better days.

"You are then going to the house of Grand-Louis?" said she to the old man.

"Without doubt. To the house of the best of my nephews; the house of my true nephew, my future heir."

"Hear me, then, Cadoche: since you are in your right senses, and are such a friend to Grand-Louis, you can do him a very great service. There is an urgent business which makes it

necessary that he should come and speak to me immediately. Tell him this, and that I will be waiting for him at the door of the great court-yard. Let him take his mare, and he will come all the more quickly."

"His mare? he no longer has her. Somebody has stolen her."

"It is all the same; only let him come, no matter how. The business is one that interests him very much."

"And what is this affair?"

"Ah, well! that can only be explained to him. Cadoche, there shall be a new twenty sous piece for you, that you may come and fetch to-morrow morning."

"At what hour?"

"Whenever you like."

"I shall come at seven o'clock. Be there, because I do not like to wait."

"Go, then."

"I am going. I shall not be more than three-quarters of an hour. Ah! that is because I have better legs than your husband, mother Bricolin, and yet I am ten years older."

And certainly the mendicant set off with a step decidedly firm. He was approaching Angibault, when he found himself in a narrow road, just before the carriage of M. Ravalard, which was being driven at a furious rate by the mischievous red-headed *patachon*, who disdained to cry out to him to take care, and pushed his horses on straight towards him.

It is contrary to the dignity of a Berrichon peasant ever to disturb himself for a carriage, whatever warning he may receive, or whatever difficulty he may occasion. Uncle Cadoche was one of the proudest people in the country. Accustomed to treat with a comic seriousness, from the height of his grandeur, all those to whom he held out a hand of supplication, he affected to slacken his pace and obstinately to keep the middle of the way, even while he felt the warm breath of the horses upon his shoulders.

"Get out of the way, there, brute!" at last cried the *patachon*, making a stroke with his whip so as to cut across his face.

The beggar turned round, and seizing the horses by the bridle, he forced them back with so much power as almost to overturn the carriage in the ditch. Then he and the furious *patachon* entered on a most desperate struggle, the latter striking him with his whip without intermission, and calling down a thousand imprecations. Old Cadoche guarded himself from his blows by stooping under the heads of the horses, while he continued to push them backwards, shaking their bits, sometimes forcing them back, and sometimes himself recoiling before them. M. Ravalard had at first assumed the airs of a great lord, as became a man who rolled in his carriage for the first time in his life. He had himself sworn against the insolent fellow who dared to stop his way, but the good heart of the Berrichon very soon prevailed over the pride of the upstart

when he saw that the old man was foolishly braving a real danger.

"Take care," said he to the *patachon*, leaning out of his *calèche;* "take care to do no harm to the poor man."

It was too late: the horses, exasperated at being whipped on the one side and pushed back on the other, made a furious bound, and overthrew Cadoche. Thanks to the admirable instinct of the generous animals, they leaped over his body without touching it, but the two wheels of the carriage passed over his breast.

The road was dull and deserted. It was too dark for M. Ravalard to distinguish the wearer of rags the same colour as the ground, lying prostrate behind his carriage which was flying so rapidly, the *patachon* himself not being able to control his horses. At first the *bourgeois* was afraid of being overturned. When the horses had become more calm, the mendicant was already far behind.

"I hope that you have not thrown him down," said he to his coachman, who was still trembling with fear and passion.

"No, no," said the *patachon*, ignorant whether he was right or wrong in what he affirmed; "he fell down on one side. It was the old villain s own fault; but the horses did not touch him, and he was not hurt, for he did not even cry out. He has escaped with a fright, and that will serve him for a lesson."

"But suppose we return and see?" said M. Ravalard.

"Oh, no, no, sir! such people as these will go to law with you for a scratch. He would very likely make it appear that his head was broken, to extort a great deal of money from you. I once met with a fellow who had the patience to keep his bed forty days to make my employer indemnify him for forty days of lost work, and he was no more ill than I was."

"People of this sort are very deceitful," said M. Ravalard, "yet I would rather not have a carriage than crush anybody under it, no matter who. Another time, my little fellow, you must stop at once rather than dispute in that way, it is so dangerous."

The *patachon*, who was not without some anxiety for the consequences of this affair, whipped his horses again that he might the more quickly increase the distance. He was not without terror or without remorse, and he went on swearing between his teeth to the end of the journey.

The Miller, Lemor, Grand'Marie, and M. Tailland the notary, were at that moment coming out of the mill. Lemor had resolved to take his departure on the following day: he had passed the night with them there, and contemplated with a gentle melancholy the beauty of the heavens and the reflection of the stars upon the river. The Miller, dull and melancholy, compelled himself to treat with politeness the lawyer, who had come to draw up a will for a farmer in the Black Valley not far distant, and who, in passing by the mill, had stopped to light his cigar and the lamps of his cabriolet.

Grand'Marie was in the course of explaining to him that by taking another direction he would avoid a long, stony road, and Grand-Louis was assuring him that if he went that very way on foot, leading his horse by the bridle, he would find the rest of the road much better. The lawyer, when his comforts were in question, was what is called in the country extremely *fafiot*, a word which is untranslatable, but which means a man at the same time indolent, and fastidious in trifling things. He had just lost a quarter of an hour, which he might have spent in resting himself at home, in requiring an explanation of how he might avoid a quarter of an hour's slight fatigue. He found out at last that to lead his horse by the bridle was still more fatiguing than to remain in his carriage and endure its joltings, but that the better of the two was bad enough, and would certainly disturb his digestion.

"Come!" said the Miller, whose sorrowful thoughts could not stifle his natural kindness of heart and complacency of disposition, "follow me gently on foot, and I will drive your carriage up to the top of the hill. When we have passed the vineyards you will have nothing but level roads."

In thus good-humouredly filling the office of a postilion, Grand-Louis was very soon obliged to drive his vehicle on one side almost into the ditch to make room for M. Ravalard's carriage, which was whirling along at a great rate. M. Ravalard, whose mind was preoccupied with his meeting with the beggar, did not recollect himself sufficiently to reply to the friendly good-night of the Miller.

"He does not know me now, because he has got a carriage," said he to Lemor, who had followed him. "Money, money! you make the world turn round, as the water turns the wheel of my mill. That unlucky *patachon* will break down all before him if he drives at such a rate over our flint-stones: without doubt he has got wine in his head and money in his fob, and I don't know which turns the brain the more quickly. Ah! Rose, Rose! they will make you drink of the poison of vanity, and before long you may forget me also. And yet she almost seemed to love me to-night. Her eyes were full of tears when they took her from me. I shall never speak to her again! She will regret me, perhaps. Ah! how happy I should feel if I were not so unfortunate!"

The Miller was diverted from these reflections by a start of the horse which he was driving. Leaning over, he saw some object, which he could but imperfectly trace, lying across the road. The animal obstinately refused to advance, and the deeply-shadowed road was so very dark in that place that Grand-Louis was obliged to descend to see whether he was stopped by a heap of stones or by an intoxicated man.

"Ah! what! my uncle!" said he, recognising the tall figure and the wallet of the mendicant. "Last night he was on the edge of the ditch; but to-day he is right across the ruts of the wheels. It looked as if he liked to be just in this spot; but it

must make him a very bad bed. Wake up, and come and sleep at the mill, you will be better off there than under the horses feet."

"The man is dead!" said Henry, raising the mendicant in his arms.

"Oh! have no fear of that. He has often gone through such deaths as this, he knows that. The jovial fellow usually carries his drink well; but on a fête-day people take more than they ought; and there is not, as folks say speaking of wine, a friend so confided in who can so entirely betray you. Come, let us leave him at the foot of this tree; we can take him as we come back and conduct him to the house."

Lemor touched the arm of the beggar.

"If I did not feel his pulse beating feebly," said he, "I should swear that he was dead. What! is he not sufficiently miserable, from old age and destitution, without a shameful passion thus dragging this wretched fellow down to be trodden under foot? yet he also is a man!"

"Bah! you are as severe as a water-drinker! Who is it that has said that the poor are under the necessity of drinking to forget their sorrows? I have heard that said somewhere, and it is a truth."

At the very moment when Lemor and the Miller were going temporarily to abandon Cadoche, they heard him breathe a deep groan.

"Ah, well, uncle!" said the Miller with a smile, "Does not that make you better?"

"I am dying!" feebly replied the beggar. "Have pity on me. Kill me at once—I am suffering too much!"

"That will pass off, uncle. A little water, and a good bed ——"

"They have crushed me, they have run over me," replied the mendicant.

"That is not impossible," said Lemor.

"Oh! that is the same thing over again," replied the Miller, who had too often seen these painful incoherences of intoxication to feel any great uneasiness. "Come, Father Cadoche! has any misfortune really happened to you?"

"Yes, the carriage, the carriage—over my stomach, over my body, over my arms!——"

"Unhook one of the lamps of the cabriolet and bring it here," said the Miller to Lemor. "They light one corner and obscure another. When we have got it close to us we shall see whether he has suffered some injury or taken too much wine!"

"No, it is not wine—it is not wine!" murmured the mendicant. "They have assassinated me—they have crushed me like a poor dog. I shall die of it. May the good God, and the Holy Virgin, and all good Christians, have pity on me and revenge my death!"

Lemor approached with the lantern. The face of the mendicant was perfectly livid; his clothes were in too ruinous a

condition for a rent or a stain, more or less, to serve as any indication of what had passed; but, throwing aside the rags which covered his breast, they saw on his emaciated sides marks of a deep red, which were the traces of the iron shoeing of the wheels which had left their furrows. However, no blood had escaped; the ribs did not appear to be broken, and the respiration was still tolerably unimpeded. He could even enter into an explanation of his accident, and possessed strength enough to pour forth against the rich man in his carriage, and the vile mercenary who outdid the insolence and cruelty of his master, all the imprecations, and all the oaths of vengeance which rage and despair were able to suggest.

"God be thanked!" said the Miller, "you are not dead, my poor Cadoche, and it is to be hoped you are not going to die. Stay! The right wheel of the carriage was in the ditch, we may see the track: that has saved you. The carriage, leaning over here, pressed upon you as little as possible. It is a miracle that it did not turn over on the other side.

"I did my utmost to make it!" said the mendicant

"Ah, well, your malice has been useful to you, uncle They have not been able to crush you, and we will reward them for it, but not that poor M. Ravalard, who will be more grieved than you are yourself, but that wicked, worthless lad "

"And the days of work that I shall lose!" said the mendicant, in a complaining tone.

"Ah! perhaps you gain more money by your walks, than we do by our work. But we will help you, father Cadoche, we will make a subscription for you; and I, for my part, will give you your weight in wheat, so don't vex yourself. When people are in any trouble, they must not let themselves be killed by fear."

While speaking thus, the good Miller, with the help of Lemor, placed the mendicant in the cabriolet, and brought him back, avoiding the flint-stones with extreme care. M. Tailland, who had not clambered very quickly up the hill, for fear of losing his breath, was astonished to see them return, and when he understood the matter, he lent his cabriolet with a good grace, though not without some uneasiness at the delay which this accident might cause him, and the fatigue which he should have in climbing up that ascent again, when he had already so nearly reached the summit. Yet, notwithstanding all this, he descended again to see if he could assist his friends of the Mill in succouring poor Cadoche.

When they had laid the old man on the Miller's own bed, he fell into a swoon, and they made him inhale some vinegar, in the hope of restoring him.

"I should like the smell of brandy much better," said he, when he began to revive, "it is more wholesome."

They brought him some.

"I should like to drink it better than to smell it," said he, "it is more strengthening."

Lemor would have opposed this. After such an accident, this fiery beverage might provoke a terrible attack of fever. The mendicant insisted. The Miller endeavoured to dissuade him, but the lawyer, who had too assiduously studied his own health not to have some medical prejudices, declared that water at such a moment, might be fatal to a man who perhaps had not tasted it for fifty years: that spirits having been his usual beverage, it was the only thing that could do him good; that he had no serious malady excepting fear, and that the stimulant of a small glass of brandy would restore his senses. The Miller's mother, and Johnny, who like all peasants believed that the virtues of wine and brandy were infallible in every case, were of the same opinion as the lawyer, that it would be advisable to gratify the poor man. The opinion of the majority carried the question, and during the time that the glass was being brought, Cadoche, who really felt himself devoured by thirst, which excites the greatest suffering, hastily carried the bottle to his lips, and swallowed above the half of its contents at a single draught.

"That is too much! That is too much!" said the Miller, stopping him.

"What, nephew!" replied the mendicant, with the dignity of the father of a family reclaiming the legitimate exercise of his authority, "do you measure my portion at your own house, do you grudge the succour which my state requires?"

This unjust reproach overcame the prudence of the good and simple Miller. He left the bottle at the mendicant's side, saying to him—

"Take care of that for another time, you have taken enough for the present."

"You are a good relation, and a worthy nephew," said Cadoche, who appeared suddenly resuscitated by the brandy, "and if I must die, I would rather die at your house, because you will have me properly buried. I have always liked a handsome funeral. Listen, nephew, Miller's man, notary! I take you all to witness, that I command my nephew and my heir, Grand-Louis of Angibault, to have me carried to the earth neither more nor less honourably than they will doubtless soon do with old Bricolin of Blanchemont, who will not long survive me, notwithstanding that he is younger, —— but who suffered his own legs to be burned in the times—— Ah! ah! tell me then, all of you, must he not have been very stupid to suffer himself to be roasted alive on account of the money which had been deposited with him?—though, it is true, he had put some of his own with it into the iron pot."

"What is this that he is saying?" said M. Tailland, who having seated himself before a table, was not very sorry to see the Miller's mother preparing tea for the sick man, reckoning upon taking a very warm cup himself, to preserve him from the night fogs on the banks of the Vauvre. "What is this that he is crowing about, with his roasted legs, and his iron pot?"

"I believe that he is talking at random," replied the Miller, "and, besides, if he were neither ill nor confused by drink, he is old enough to dote, and these tales of his youth occupy him more than those of yesterday. It is the way with old people. How do you feel yourself now, uncle?"

"I feel much better since I took that little drop, though your brandy is miserably weak. Can they have done such a roguish trick as to mix water with it for the sake of economy? Listen, nephew, if you refuse me anything while I am ill, I will disinherit you!"

"Oh, yes, talk about that, *for a change!*" said the Miller, shrugging his shoulders, "you had much better try to sleep, father Cadoche."

"Sleep! I have no desire to sleep," replied the mendicant, raising himself from his pillow, and surveying everything around him with sparkling eyes. "I feel that I am finished, but I do wish to die on my side like a bullock. Ay, marry! I feel something very heavy in my stomach, here over my heart, as if I had a stone in its place. It pains me—it racks me—Grand' Marie, do something to bind it down Nobody is doing anything for me here, as if I were not an uncle who had an inheritance to leave behind him."

"May not the ribs be broken?" said Lemor. "Perhaps it is that which oppresses his heart."

"Neither I nor any one here can have the least idea," said the Miller, "but we can easily send in search of the doctor, who, without doubt, is still at Blanchemont."

"And who is to pay the doctor for his visit?" said the mendicant, who was as avaricious as he was vain of his pretended wealth.

"I will do that," replied Grand-Louis, "at least if he will not prescribe for you for the sake of humanity. It shall never be said that a poor fellow perished in my house for the want of the same assistance that would have been given to a rich person. Johnny, mount Sophia, go very quickly, and fetch M. Lavergne."

"Mount Sophia!" said Cadoche, sneeringly. "You say that from habit, nephew. You forget that Sophia has been stolen."

"Sophia stolen?" said the Miller's mother turning round.

"Nonsense!" replied the Miller, "mother, do not pay any attention to what he says. Tell me, then, father Cadoche," added he, lowering his voice, and addressing the mendicant, "you know about that! Perhaps you can give me news of my horse, and of the thief?"

"Who can know anything about such things?" replied Cadoche, with a manner which baffled observation, "who is there to discover the thieves? Not the *gendarmes*, they are too stupid. They were never able to say who it was that burnt Father Bricolin's legs, and carried his iron pot away."

"Ah, that again, do tell us all about it, uncle," replied the

Miller; "you are always talking about those legs, you think so very much about them. For this long while past, every time I meet you, you go back to that affair. And to night there is an iron pot added to the history. You have never told me about that."

"Do not make him talk," said the Miller's mother, "you will only redouble his fever."

And in reality the mendicant was in a fever. Every time his hosts turned their heads, he swallowed quantities of the brandy by stealth, adroitly replacing the bottle under his bolster at the side of his bed. Each moment he appeared to improve in strength, and it was wonderful to see how his iron framework supported, at such an age, the consequences of an accident which would have crushed another.

"The iron pot!" said he, looking fixedly at Grand-Louis, with eyes full of so strange an expression, as to excite in him a sort of inexplicable alarm. "The iron pot! That is the best part of the tale, and I will tell you the whole of it."

"Tell it, tell it, Father Cadoche, that interests me!" said the lawyer, who was examining him attentively.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE WILL.

"There was an iron pot," said the mendicant, "an old and very ugly iron pot, which looked as if it were worth nothing at all, but we ought not to judge from looks. In this pot so well sealed up, and so heavy—oh! but it was heavy!—there were fifty thousand francs, belonging to the old lord of Blanchemont, whose grand-daughter is now at Bricolin's farm. And furthermore, old Father Bricolin, who was a young man in those days—it is forty years since, exactly—had thrust into this pot fifty thousand francs of his own, arising from some good business which he had been doing with his wools. Those were the times, on account of supplying the army! The deposit of the nobleman, and the profits of the farmer, were all in good *Louis d'ors*, worth twenty-four francs a piece, bearing the likeness of the good King Louis XVI. of that sort which we call *toad-eyed*, on account of the escutcheon, which is round. I always did like that money the best. People say that you lose by it in change, but I say that you gain by it. Twenty three francs and eleven sous, must always be worth more than a villanous Napoleon of twenty francs. All these were mixed up together. Only as the farmer loved his own *louisd'ors* for their own sakes, (that is the way, boys, in which people ought

to love their money,) he had marked all his own with a cross to distinguish them from those of his lord, when he should have to restore them. In doing this, he had followed the example of his master, who had marked his own with a simple stroke, for the sake of amusement, as they say, and to see that they were not changed. The mark was there then—is there yet—not one is missing, on the contrary, there are others with them!——"

"What is he raving about now?" said the Miller, looking at the lawyer.

"Peace!" replied the latter, "let him go on, I begin to understand. So then—" said he to the mendicant.

"So then," resumed Cadoche, "he had put the iron pot in a hole in the wall at the *Château* of Beaufort, and had bricked up the wall over it. When the *chauffeurs* came to him—it is not to be believed that these people were all of the lower sort, there were some poor among them, but there were also some rich—I know them very well—some of them are still living, and people bow low enough to them; there were among us ——"

"Among you?" exclaimed the Miller.

"Keep quiet!" said the lawyer, with a strong pressure of the arm.

"I would say that they had among them, resumed the mendicant, "an advocate, a mayor, a *curé*, a miller: there was, perhaps, also a notary. Eh! eh! M. Tailland, I do not say that for you. You had scarcely come into the world; no, nor you, nephew, you would have been too simple for such an affair—"

"In short, the *chauffeurs* took the money?" said the notary.

"They did not take it, and that was the most singular part of the business. They so burned and frizzled the legs of that poor turkey, Bricolin, that it was frightful, but it was also grand to see it."

"You did see it, then?" said the Miller, unable to control himself.

"Oh, no!" replied Cadoche, "I did not see it; it was one of my friends—that is to say, a man who found himself there, and related the whole thing to me."

"So much the better," said the Miller, his mind more satisfied.

"Take your cup of tea, now, Father Cadoche," said the Miller's mother, "and don't chatter so much: it will do you harm."

"To the deuce with your hot water," replied the mendicant, repulsing the cup; "I have a horror of such slops. Let me relate my history. I have had it long enough by heart; I wish to tell it once entirely through before I die, and yet I meet with nothing but interruptions."

"That is true," said the lawyer; "this morning you wished to tell it under the trees, and everybody turned his back

upon you, saying, 'Ah! here is Father Cadoche beginning his old tale about the *chauffeurs:* let us go!' but, for my part, it amuses me, and I would willingly hear the rest: so, pray go on."

"Figure to yourself," said Cadoche, "that this man of whom I speak—and who found himself there by accident, almost in spite of himself—was a poor peasant whom they had entrapped; and when he was seized with fright, and they saw that he wished to get away, they threatened to knock out his brains if he did not remount the horse which they had brought, and which was shod the reverse way, the same as the rest, in order that in retiring they might leave traces on the ground that might bewilder their pursuers. And when the man I speak of got there, and saw that he must do as the others did, he set himself to search and rummage everywhere to find the money. He liked that better than helping to roast that poor Bricolin; for this comrade that I am telling you of was not a wicked man. Truly, that business did not please him; and it horrified him to see—that was dreadful—the poor fellow shrieking loud enough to split people's ears, his wife in a swoon, his wretched legs struggling in the fire, and which I think I am always seeing: there has not been a night since that I have not dreamed of them. Bricolin was a very strong man in those days, and he struggled so much that he bent a bar of iron, which was in the midst of the fire, with his feet. Ah! I was not mixed up with that—I swear it before my Maker! When they compelled me to hold a napkin over his mouth, the sweat rolled down from off my forehead like ice-drops."

"From yours?" said the Miller, astonished.

"From the forehead of the man who related this to me. Then the man that I am speaking of found an opportunity of stealing away, and set himself to search—search, high and low in the house, striking against all the walls with a pickaxe to see if they sounded hollow, and demolishing everything, right and left, just as the others were doing. But no one saw him slipping into a little pig-stye, saving your presence! and in that he found himself all alone. Ever since then, I have always liked pigs, and I have brought up one every year. He struck the wall, and he listened; and he heard that the sound was hollow. He looked around him: I was quite alone. He worked at pulling down the wall; he rummaged, and he found—guess what? the iron pot! We know very well that that was the real money-box of Father Bricolin. The smith who had made it had boasted so much about it at the time, that I was very quickly assured that this was the pot of roses. And it was so heavy! But that was of no consequence; my friend found he had got the strength of a bull in his arms and in his heart. He escaped excellently well with his iron pot, and left the place without saying 'good-night' to the others. No one has ever seen him in that part of the country since. That was a great game which he was playing. The *chauffeurs* would have killed him without

ceremony if they had discovered him. He walked day and night without eating or drinking, until he found himself in a wood, where he buried his pot in the ground, and then slept, I know not how many hours. I was so fatigued with carrying such a burden! When I was seized with hunger I was very much embarrassed. I had not the value of a sou; and I knew that among my hundred thousand francs there was not a single louis that was not marked. I had looked at them all: I had not been able to keep myself from doing so. I saw very clearly that cursed mark would be known, and the money that would be pointed out by it to the police. To try to efface it by scratching it out would be worse; and then for a poor fellow like that I am talking about to change a louis d'or for a morsel of bread at a baker's shop would certainly have awakened suspicions. There was only one thing left for him to do, and that was to turn beggar. The police were not so alert in those days as they are now; in proof of which there was not a single *chauffeur* punished, or even obliged to leave the country. The business of a beggar is good when people know how to conduct it. I have saved something without depriving myself of anything. My friend was not so stupid as to call in a blacksmith to close his iron pot. He buried it exactly in the middle of a wretched hut of mud and straw, which served him for a house, and which he built for himself in the depths of the wood. For the period of forty years nobody has tormented him, because nobody has envied his condition, and he has enjoyed the pleasure of being richer and prouder than all those who were despising him."

"And of what use has his gold been to him?" said Henry.

"He looks at it every week when he returns to his cabin, and deposits with it the money he has collected as alms. He does not keep more by him than will pay for his tobacco and his brandy. From time to time he has a mass said to discharge his debt to the good God for the service he has received, and he goes through the business with a great deal of order and propriety. He is not so stupid as to take a single piece out of his treasure. That might not excite suspicion, now that the history is forgotten and the search given up; but it might make people think that he is rich, and they would no longer bestow their charity. Come, my children; this is the history of the iron pot. How do you like it?"

"It is excellent," observed the lawyer, "and it is well to know it!"

A profound silence succeeded to this recital. The actors in this scene looked at each other, divided between surprise, fear, contempt, and a sort of desire to laugh strangely mingled with all these emotions. Cadoche, exhausted by his long history, fell back upon his pillow, his face pallid and overspread with a greenish hue. His long beard, stubborn, and still black enough to throw a deep shade of gloom over his ashy visage, completed the frightfulness of his appearance. His hollow eyes, which had so lately darted fire during the intoxication and the raving

delirium of his language, seemed now to fall back into their orbits, losing their light in the glazing films of death. His large, thin, aquiline nose, his retreating lips, his strongly-marked features, which might have been agreeable in his youth, not proclaiming a natural ferocity, but a strange mixture of avarice, cunning, suspicion, sensuality, and even of good-humour.

"And this," said the Miller at last—"is it a dream which has come over him, or a confession that we have been hearing? Is it the doctor or the curé that ought to be called in?"

"It is the mercy of God," said Lemor, who was observing more attentively than the others the alteration in the face of the mendicant, and the difficulty of his respiration. "Either I am greatly deceived, or this man has but a few moments to live."

"I have but a few moments to live!" said the mendicant, making an effort to raise himself up; "who is it that says that? Is it the doctor? I have no faith in doctors. Let them all go to the deuce!"

He leaned over the bedside, and finished his bottle of brandy, then, turning round, he was seized with a fearful pang, and suffered a cry to escape him.

"My heart is racked," said Cadoche, struggling resolutely against his sufferings. "Perhaps I may never recover. And supposing that I should not be able to return to my cottage, what will become of everything there? And my poor pig!—who will take care of him? He is used to feed himself on the bread which people give me, which I take to him every week. There is a little neighbour very near who leads him into the fields. The little coquette!—she gives me such sweet looks, in hopes that she may inherit my property; but she will get nothing from me: here is my heir."

And Cadoche extended his hand towards Grand-Louis with a solemn air.

"He has always been kinder to me than anybody else. He is the only one who has treated me as I ought to be treated—who has made me sleep in a bed—who has given me wine, tobacco, brandy, and meat, instead of crusts of bread, which I never touch. I myself have always practised one virtue—gratitude. I have always loved Grand-Louis and the good God, because they have been kind to me. So, then, I will make my will in his favour, as I have always promised. Grand'-Marie, do you think I am ill enough for it to be time to make my will?"

"No, no, my poor man!" said the Miller's mother, who in her angelic simplicity had only taken the recital of the beggar for a sort of dream; "don't make your will: they say that it brings bad fortune, and makes people die."

"On the contrary," said M. Tailland, "it does them good; it is comforting: it restores the dead."

"In that case, lawyer, I will try the remedy," said the men-

dicant. "I love that which I possess, and I must know that it will pass into good hands, and not into those of the queer little creatures who pay their court to me, and who shall have nothing of mine but the ribbon and the bouquet in my hat to make themselves fine with on Sundays. Lawyer, take your pen, and scribble this in proper terms, and without leaving anything out.

"'I give and bequeath to my friend Grand-Louis, of Angibault, all that I possess—my house situated at Jeu-lez-Bois, my little square plot of potatoes, my pig, my horse ——'"

"Have you a horse?" said the Miller; "and pray how long have you had one?"

"Since last night. It is a horse that I found in my walks."

"May it not by chance be mine?"

"You have said it. It is your old Sophia, who is not worth the iron she wears."

"Excuse me, uncle!" said the Miller, half-pleased, half-vexed. "I like Sophia; she is worth more than—a great many people. What! could you not refrain from stealing Sophia, and from me? I would have trusted you with the key of my mill.—Do you see the old hypocrite!"

"Hold your tongue, nephew! you talk foolishly," gravely replied Cadoche. "It would be strange for an uncle not to have a right to use his nephew's mare. What is yours is mine, since by my will and testament what is mine is yours."

"Fortunately," replied the Miller; "leave me Sophia—leave her to me; leave her to me, uncle; I accept that. It is lucky for me that you have not had time to sell her; you old rogue!" he muttered between his teeth.

"What is that which you say?" inquired the mendicant.

"Nothing, uncle," said the Miller, perceiving that the old man had a sort of convulsive rattle in his throat. "I say that you would have done quite right if it had been your pleasure to ask charity on horseback."

"Have you finished, lawyer?" asked Cadoche in a faint voice. "You write very slowly. I feel myself suffocating. Make haste, you idle law scribbler!"

"It is done," said the lawyer. "Do you know how to sign it?"

"Better than you," replied Cadoche; "but I cannot see. I must have my spectacles and a pinch of snuff."

"Here," said the Miller's mother.

"That is well," replied he, after having taken his pinch of snuff with great relish; "that revives me. Come, I am not dead yet, though I suffer like one possessed!"

He cast his eyes over the will and said, "Ah! you have not forgot the iron pot and its contents?"

"Certainly not," replied M. Tailland.

"You have done right," replied Cadoche, with an air of deep irony; "though all that I told you about that was only a tale to mock you."

"I was sure of that!" said the Miller with a joyful air; "if you had had that money, you would have restored it to those who had a right to it. You have always been an honest man, uncle, though you did steal my mare; but that was only one of your jests—you would have brought her back to me. Come, don't sign that stupid thing. I have no need of your riggings out, and perhaps they would do some poor creature good. Besides, perhaps you may have some relations, that I would not injure by taking your last sou."

"I have no relations; I have buried them all, I am thankful to say," replied the mendicant: "and as to the poor—I despise them! Give me the pen, or I will curse you!"

"Come, come; you shall please yourself," said the Miller, passing the pen to him.

The mendicant signed; and then pushing it from before his eyes with a look of horror—

"Take it away! take it away!" he exclaimed; "it seems as if it would kill me!"

"Shall I tear it to pieces?" said Grand-Louis.

"No, no!" replied the mendicant, with a last effort of his mind; "put it in your pocket, my boy; and perhaps you will not be sorry for it. Ah! this pain! Where is the doctor? I must have him to finish me more quickly, if I am to suffer a long time in this way."

"He is coming," said the Miller's mother, "and M. le Curé with him; I sent for both."

"The curé!" said Cadoche; "and for what?"

"To speak a word of consolation to you, old man. You have always had some religion, and your soul is as precious as that of another. I am very sure that M. le Curé will not refuse to bring you the sacraments."

"Am I come to that, then?" replied the dying man, with a deep sigh. "In that case, no nonsense for me! and let the curé go to all the five hundred furies, though he is a good man, after all, and likes his glass; but I have no faith in curés. I love the good God, and not the priest. The good God has given me money—the priest would take it away from me. Leave me to die in peace!—Nephew, promise me to beat that wretched *patachon* to death."

"No; but I will beat him soundly."

"Enough!" said the mendicant, stretching out his livid hand. "I could have wished to die talking, but I can no more —— Ah! I am not so ill as they believe; I am going to sleep; and, perhaps, you may not come into your inheritance quite so soon, nephew."

The mendicant fell back, and at the end of a moment a gurgling, gushing sound rose from his breast. First he became red, then pale, groaned for some minutes, opened his eyes with an air of fear, as if Death had appeared to him in some sensible shape; and then suddenly, half smiling, as if he had resumed the hope of life, yielded up his spirit.

The death of even the worst of men has always in it something solemn and mysterious, impressing religious minds with respect, and imposing silence in its presence. There was a moment of consternation and even of sorrow at the mill, when the medicant Cadoche expired. Notwithstanding his vices and eccentricities—notwithstanding the strange confession which they had heard, and in which the lawyer was the only one who firmly believed, Grand'Marie and her son had a sort of friendship for the old man, on account of the good which they had been accustomed to do him; for if it be truly said that we detest people on account of the injuries we have inflicted on them, the reverse of the same maxim ought also to be admitted.

The Miller's mother threw herself on her knees by the bedside and prayed. Lemor and the Miller prayed also in their hearts to the Dispenser of all justice and all mercy, not to abandon the divine and immortal soul which had just departed from this earth, under the abject form of that miserable old man.

The lawyer alone calmly turned round and swallowed his cup of tea, after having said with coolness, "*Ite, missa est; Dominus vobiscum.*"

"Grand-Louis," said he immediately after, calling him out of the chamber, "it is necessary that you should go directly to Jeu-lez-Bois before the news of this death can reach the place. Some beggar of this man's own sort may go and ransack his hut and steal this egg out of its nest."

"What egg?" said the Miller. "His pig, or his smock-frock, that he keeps to wear in change?"

"No; but the iron pot?"

"A dream, M. Tailland!"

"Go at once and see. And, besides, your mare ——"

"Ah, my old servant! I had forgotten; but you are quite right. She is worth the journey, on account of her good heart and our old friendship. She and I are almost of the same age: I will go there. I hope he has not been bantering me about that too. He was an old jester."

"Go at once, I tell you; and don't be idle. I believe in that iron pot. My belief is as *hard as iron*, as they say with us."

"But tell me, M. Tailland; is that rag of paper worth anything, that you have been scribbling over for your amusement?"

"It is in good form, I can answer for that; and I may perhaps make you the owner of a hundred thousand francs."

"Me! But you forget that, if this tale be true, there is one-half belonging to Madame de Blanchemont, and the other to Bricolin."

"That is an additional reason for you to go quickly. You have accepted this bequest, having determined in your heart to charge yourself with its restitution. Go, then, and search

for it. When you have done M. Bricolin such a service, it will be a strange thing, indeed, if he will not give you his daughter."

"His daughter! Am I dreaming of his daughter? Is his daughter dreaming of me?" said the Miller with a blush.

"Good! good! prudence is a virtue; but I happened to see you dancing together a little while ago, and I perfectly understand why her father separated you so roughly."

"M. Tailland, leave all that out of your thoughts. If there should be a hoard in good earnest, what shall I do? Will it not be necessary to make some declaration of it to the proper authorities?"

"To what purpose? The forms of justice were invented for those who have no justice in their own hearts. What good would it do to dishonour the memory of this old simpleton, who has succeeded for fourscore years in passing for an honest man? Neither is there the least occasion to prove that you are not a thief: people know that already. You will restore the money, and everything will be right."

"But if this old man should have any relations?"

"He has not: and even if he had, do you wish them to inherit that which does not belong to them?"

"That is true. I am quite bewildered with what has happened. I will go and mount my horse."

"That will not be convenient for carrying this famous iron pot, which is so heavy, so very heavy! Are the roads passable down there?"

"Certainly. From this we go to Transault, and then to Lis-Saint-George, and then to Jeu. The roads are all freshly repaired and good."

"In that case, take my carriage, Grand-Louis, and make haste."

"Ah! well, but what will you do?"

"Sleep here while I am waiting."

"You are a kind man; but if the beds should be bad—you, who are a little dainty ——"

"That would be all the worse; but a single night is soon passed. Besides, we could not leave your mother alone with this dead man: that would be too melancholy; for it is necessary that you should take your man of the mill with you. There ought to be two to carry the money that is to be carried. You will find loaded pistols in the pockets of my cabriolet. I never travel without them, often having valuable things to carry. Come, set off at once. Tell your mother to make tea again. We shall chat as long as we can, and make it as late as possible; for the sight of this dead body is rather disagreeable to me."

Five minutes after, Lemor and the Miller were, in a dark night, taking their way towards Jeu-lez-Bois. We will give them time to arrive there, and return to see what is passing at the farm during their journey.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE DISASTER.

THE grandmother Bricolin grew very impatient at not seeing the Miller arrive. She was far from thinking that her emissary would never return to receive the payment which she had promised him; and the reader will easily understand, that at the moment he was expiring, the mendicant had forgotten to deliver the message with which he had been charged. At last, discouraged and tired of waiting, Madame Bricolin returned to her old husband, after having assured herself that the maniac was still wandering in the warren, absorbed according to custom in her own meditations, and no longer making the tranquil valley resound with the echoes of her lamentations. It was now about midnight. The sound of some few discordant voices might still be heard as the last revellers issued from the *cabarets*, while the dogs belonging to the farm, as if they knew the voices of their friends, did not even deign to bark.

Monsieur Bricolin, urged by his wife, who earnestly desired that this species of underhand engagement with Marcelle should be carried into instant execution, had, but not without grief and terror, transferred to the *dame venderesse*, the pocket-book which contained two hundred and fifty thousand francs. Marcelle received this venerable pocket-book with very little emotion. It was so greasy, that in receiving it she only touched it with the tips of her fingers, and, wearied with being engaged in a business in which the avarice of others had filled her with disgust, she threw it into a corner of Rose's writing-desk. She had accepted this prompt payment for the same reason that had decided the purchaser on making it, in order to confirm the engagement, and so to secure the good fortune of the young girl, by making it impossible for M. Bricolin to retract.

She had desired Fanchon, at whatever hour Grand-Louis might present himself, to take him into the kitchen, and to come and call her. Then she threw herself, dressed as she was, upon her bed, to rest herself without sleeping; for Rose was still very much excited, and could not cease from blessing her, and talking of her own happiness. Still the Miller did not come; and, the emotions of the day having exhausted the strength of all, towards two o'clock in the morning all the people at the farm were buried in profound sleep. It is

necessary, however, to except one person in the family: this was the lunatic, whose brain was heated under an intolerable paroxysm of fever.

M. Bricolin and his wife had been talking a long time together in the kitchen. The farmer, having nothing more to fear, and feeling himself almost frozen by the water which he had drunk, had again taken his tankard, which he refilled hour after hour, with an unsteady hand, from an enormous jug placed at his side, and filled with foaming violet-coloured wine. This was unfermented wine, yet the most heady produce of the crop—a detestable beverage, but one which the Berrichon prefers to all other wines in the world.

Many times his wife, seeing that the exultation of being the owner of Blanchemont, and the cheering prospect of his opulence, could no longer brighten his dull eye nor support his drooping head, had urged him to go to bed; but his constant reply was, "Presently—I am going—I am gone—" but without quitting his chair. At last, having ascertained that Rose and Marcelle were both asleep, Madame Bricolin, incapable of further exertion, went to bed herself, and fell asleep, even while vainly calling upon her husband, who had not power to move, and no longer heard her. Completely intoxicated and prostrated, like a man who has made an effort suddenly to sober himself, but has thoroughly indemnified himself for it afterwards, the farmer, his hand upon his pitcher, and his head leaning on the table, kept pace in his sonorous snoring with the heavy sleep of his wife, who was in bed in the adjoining chamber.

An hour had scarcely passed when M. Bricolin felt himself suffocating, and almost falling into a state of insensibility. With a great deal of trouble he raised himself from his seat. It appeared to him that the air was failing in his lungs, that his usually sharp eyes could no longer discern any object, and that he was struck with apoplexy. The fear of death gave him strength to drag himself, groping, to the door, which opened into the court-yard: his candle had burned out in its tin socket.

Having succeeded in opening the door, and in descending the rough stone steps of the new château, the farmer gazed around him with a stupefied air, but without comprehending what he saw. An extraordinary light, which filled the court-yard, compelled him to put his hands before his eyes, and the sudden change from intense darkness to this dazzling light made his brain whirl afresh. At last, the fresh air having in some degree dissipated the fumes of the wine, the species of lethargy which he had experienced gave place to a convulsive shuddering, physical and mechanical at first, but very soon produced by an inexpressible terror. Two great jets of flame, making their way through clouds of smoke, were breaking through the roof of the barn.

Bricolin believed himself in a frightful dream: he rubbed

his eyes, he shook his limbs—still those bursts of flame mounted towards the sky, increasing with frightful rapidity. He would have cried "Fire!" but his tongue was paralysed and his throat incapable of articulating a syllable. He attempted to return towards the house, from which he was but a few steps distant, but without knowing where he was going. He saw on his right hand torrents of flame pouring from the stables; on his left, another mass of fire crowning the towers of the old château; and before him, his own house, illuminated in the interior with a fantastic light, and from the doorway which he had left open behind him, came vomiting forth black whirlwinds of smoke, as if from the mouth of a forge. Every part of the Blanchemont buildings was the prey of a tremendous conflagration. The flames had been kindled in more than a dozen different places, and that which was most threatening at first in this strange scene was the deathlike silence that hovered over all. Bricolin, bereft of all bodily power and presence of mind, stood contemplating in fearful loneliness a disaster which no other person had yet perceived. All the inmates of the new château and the farm had passed from a sleep caused by fatigue or intoxication into a state of lethargy produced by the suffocating fumes. The crackling of the fire alone now began to make itself heard, and the tiles to fall with a loud rattling noise upon the pavement. Not a cry, not a complaint, answered these foreboding warnings. It appeared as if that raging fire had nothing more to consume than dead bodies and ruined buildings. M. Bricolin wrung his hands and remained mute and motionless, as if, weighed down by the nightmare, he could only make vain efforts to awaken.

At last a piercing cry arose—a woman's single cry! and Bricolin, as if delivered from the dream which oppressed him answered by a savage howl to this appeal of the human voice. Marcelle had first perceived the danger, and she came rushing from the house, carrying her boy in her arms. Without perceiving Bricolin, or the extent of the flames that were raging around, she laid her child on a heap of hay in the middle of the court-yard, saying to him in an impressive voice: "Stay here, and do not be afraid," and then precipitately re-entering the house, notwithstanding the suffocating smoke which filled it, she ran to the bed of Rose, who had remained as if paralysed and incapable of following her.

Then, with the strength of a man, this fair, slender, and delicate woman, inspired by courage, took her young friend in her arms, and heroically carried to the side of her son a body much heavier and larger than her own.

At the sight of his daughter, Bricolin, who had first thought only of his crops and his cattle, and had run towards his barns, recollected that he had a family, and, sobered for the second time, more thoroughly than at first, he flew to the assistance of his mother and his wife.

Happily the fire had yet seized only on the timbers of the roof; and the ground-floor, inhabited by the Bricolins, was still untouched, with the exception of the apartment of Rose, which, being very low, and in the vicinity of a pile of dry faggots, burned very rapidly.

Madame Bricolin, rising suddenly, startled out of her sleep, recovered in a moment her strength and her presence of mind. Assisted by her husband and Marcelle, she carried old Bricolin out of the house, who, believing himself to be in the midst of the *chauffeurs*, cried out with all his might—

"I have nothing more! Do not kill me! Do not burn me! I will give you all!"

Little Fanchon most resolutely assisted the grandmother Bricolin, who was herself soon able to help the others. They succeeded in rousing the farmer's men and the boys, not one of whom was lost. But all this took a considerable time, and when they could receive assistance from the village, and were able to organise a chain of persons to supply water, it was too late. The water appeared to aggravate the fire in its intensity, by rousing the burning masses, and making the sparks fly in showers around. The enormous heaps of corn and forage, with which the agricultural buildings were actually overflowing, were consumed with the rapidity of thought. The timber-work of the buildings, of a century's age, seemed to court destruction. Almost all the fat cattle, obstinately resisting to be driven out, were either stifled or burnt to death. They were only able to preserve the walls of the new château, of which the roof had fallen in, leaving the fresh timbers uncovered and reduced to charcoal resting its black carcase on the still white walls of the building.

The fire-engines came—in the country a useless and tardy resource—instruments of assistance generally ill-managed and badly constructed, and of which, in the present case, the pipes burst at the first moment of application from want of use and from not being kept with proper attention. However, the firemen and the townspeople succeeded in some degree in subduing the violence of the conflagration, and in preserving the habitation and moveable furniture of the Bricolins. But the fire had effected the most complete and ruinous devastation. The apartment of Rose, which had been occupied by herself and Marcelle, all the agricultural buildings, all the cattle, all the farming implements, were gone. No one paid any attention to the old château, the roof of which was burnt while the strongly built, bare walls were enabled to support themselves in the general ruin. One only of the towers, unable to resist the overpowering element, cracked from the top to the bottom. The immense quantity of ivy which had interwoven itself around the rest, had assisted in saving them from utter ruin.

The grey light of morning was beginning to dawn when the Miller and Lemor left the miserable cabin of the mendicant. Lemor was carrying the iron pot in his hands, and Grand-Louis

was leading by the bridle his beloved Sophia, who had saluted him on his approach with a friendly neighing.

"I have read Don Quixote," said he, "and I find myself now very much like Sancho recovering his ass. It would only be necessary, to complete the likeness, that I should embrace my old Sophia, and that I should hold a grand conversation with her."

"Grand-Louis," said Lemor, "if you have resisted that temptation you have also resisted another—that of looking to see whether the contents of this iron pot may turn out to be gold or flint-stones."

"I have lifted up the cover," said the Miller. "That which was within shone brightly enough; but I am very anxious to hurry away before day, that the inhabitants of this desert, if there be any, may not observe my movements and take me for a thief. I tremble with agitation and pleasure, like a man who is conducting the affairs of another to a successful end; but I also possess the coolness of a man who is receiving no inheritance for himself. Get on, get on, Master Henry! Have you replaced the pickaxe in the carriage? Wait, while I give another glance round within. The whole is well covered in; it does not attract attention in the least: so let us go. We must rest in some wood if our horses are not able to go on."

The horse of the notary having gone over three mortal leagues of country at full trot, and often at a gallop, through mountainous and painful roads, was in reality so much jaded in returning, that our travellers, on arriving at the height of Lis-Saint-George, were compelled to give him breathing-time. Sophia, whom they had fastened behind the cabriolet, and who was not accustomed to run so madly, was covered with sweat, and the Miller's heart was moved at seeing her in such a state.

"We must have some mercy on our animals," said he; "and besides I should not wish that, for his honesty and sagacity in this business, our good notary should lose his horse. Then, as for Sophia, I would not take any iron pot for her. She is an old servant, and ought not to do the office of an earthen vessel. Here is a pretty, shady pasture, where neither beast nor man will disturb us. Let us turn into it. I am sure we shall find a bag of oats in the box of the cabriolet, for M. Tailland thinks of everything, and he is not a man ever to embark without his biscuits. We will take a quarter of an hour's breathing-time, and then we shall be a little fresh to set off again. Unfortunately, when I let loose my uncle's pig (let who will inherit it), I forgot to steal from him some of his crusts of bread; and I feel my stomach so empty, that I would willingly share Sophia's oats with her if I did not fear doing her wrong. It appears to me that I have made but a poor beginning of my part of a miser's heir, for I am dying of hunger with my treasure close by my side."

While thus chatting in his usual manner, the Miller loosed

the horses and gave them their breakfast. The lawyer's he supplied from the bag of oats, and Sophia from his own long blue cotton cap, which he attached to her nose very ludicorously.

"It is singular how light I feel my heart just now," said he, as he threw himself down under the bushes and uncovered the iron pot. Do you know, M. Lemor, that my happiness is in the inside of this, provided that the gold pieces are not merely on the surface, and that the bottom is only filled with great sous. I am afraid it is too heavy to be nothing but gold. Come, now, help me to count it all."

The reckoning was soon done. The gold pieces of the old money were rolled up in sums of a thousand francs in dirty rags of paper. On opening them, Lemor and the Miller saw the marks which the beggar had mentioned. The fortune of old Bricolin bore a cross on each louis; the deposit of the lord of Blanchemont a single line. At the bottom there were about three thousand francs in silver, in pieces of every kind; and even a handful of great sous, the last savings of the mendicant.

"The remainder," said the Miller, throwing it back into the bottom of the iron pot, "is the fortune of my uncle, and the inheritance of your servant; and it is the widow's mite, which the grasping old man thought he was doing no sin to collect, and which, I promise you, shall return to the widow and the orphan. Who knows if it be not also the product of theft? Seeing how my uncle, peace to his soul! juggled Sophia away from me, I cannot have too much confidence in the purity of his legacy. Yet, stay! it will give me the pleasure of being charitable—I who am so often deprived of that sweet satisfaction—I shall take the pleasure of a prince. Do you know that with three thousand francs here in the country, we can save three families from misery and provide for their existence?"

"But you do not think about the remainder of this deposit, Grand-Louis. Recollect, then, that with this large sum, of which Madame de Blanchemont has in truth no personal necessity, you are going to put it in her power to make many others happy also."

"Oh, I shall carry them to her and lay them very quickly on her table. But, on my side, there is something which flatters me—that is, the little hoard which M. Bricolin will receive at my hands with so much pleasure. That part of the contents of the iron pot will not be employed in a very Christian way by him, but it will help to bring about an accommodation of my affairs with him, which were in a very discouraging state last night."

"That is to say, my dear Louis, that you may now make some pretensions to the hand of Rose?"

"Oh, no, you must not think that. If the fifty thousand francs really belonged to me, that might be arranged without difficulty; but M. Bricolin knows better how to reckon than

you. He will say, 'Here are five thousand pistoles which belong to me, which Grand-Louis has brought me: he has done no more than his duty. What belongs to me does not belong to him; therefore I have fifty thousand francs more in my pocket, and he remains with his mill, a clown, just as he was before.'"

"And will he not be touched and surprised at an honesty of which, without doubt, he would not himself be capable?"

"Surprised! yes; touched! no. But he will say to himself, 'This young man may be useful to me. Honest people are very necessary to those who are not so.' And he will forgive me my sins, and give me his business back again, which I very much value, because it enables me to see Rose, and to speak to her every day. You see, then, that, without deceiving myself, I have some cause for satisfaction. Last night, when I danced with Rose, when she seemed to love me, I felt so proud, so happy! Ah! well. I find once more my last night's happiness, without disturbing myself about to morrow. That is a great thing. Brave Uncle Cadoche, you little imagined what consolation there would be for me in your iron pot! You intended to make me rich, and you have made me happy."

"But, my dear Louis, since you take to Marcelle a sum equal to that which she desires to sacrifice for you, you may surely now accept the concessions which she offered to make to M. Bricolin."

"I! Never! Do not mention it: it wounds me. I shall be no longer banished from the farm—that is all I must look for. See how pretty this treasure is; how dazzling is this brightness! and truly there lies in it many troubles consoled, many anxieties appeased. It is, however, a very fine thing, this money, M. Lemor: you must confess that. Here now, in the hollow of my hand, is the life of five or six poor children."

"Friend, I see there only what really is: the tears, the shrieks, the tortures of old Bricolin, the avarice of the mendicant, his life of shame and stupidity, wasted in the trembling contemplation of his own deed of theft."

"Oh, you are right," said the Miller, throwing back with aversion the handful of gold into the iron pot; "there is nothing but crimes, but sloth, but anxiety, but deceit, but fear and suffering within. You are right: money is a base thing. We ourselves, who are here looking at it and counting it in this concealment, we look like two robbers armed with pistols, dreading to be surprised by other bandits, or apprehended by the gendarmes by a grasp of the collar. Be you shut up, accursed!" he exclaimed, replacing the cover; "and, for ourselves, let us go, friend. Joy be with us! This is none of ours!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

A RUPTURE.

In approaching the valley of the Vauvre, our travellers remarked in the direction of Blanchemont an immense cloud of heavy smoke which the rising sun began to whiten and illumine.

"Look there," said the Miller, "what a dense mist there is rising over the Vauvre this morning, over the side where you and I are always wishing to look. That annoys me, because it prevents me from seeing the pointed roofs of my good old little château, which on every side, when I am making my rounds in the neighbourhood, serves as the point of attraction to my thoughts."

At the end of about ten minutes, the smoke, which the damp vapours of the morning had borne down beneath their weight, covered the surface of the valley; and Grand-Louis, suddenly arresting the steps of the lawyer's horse, said to his companion—

"This is strange, M. Lemor. I don't know whether my sight may be dim this morning, but I see nothing of the red roof of the new chateau beneath the towers of the old. I am, however, very sure that it may be seen from here, for I have stopped here above a hundred times to look at it; and even now I can distinguish the surrounding trees. Ah, but look there! The old chateau is quite different. The towers seem as if they were lowered. Where is the roof! Thunder strike me! there is nothing but the gable-ends! Stay, stay! What can that red light be on the side of the farm? It is fire! yes; it is fire! And all those black objects——M. Lemor, I was right when I told you, just when we reached Jeu-les-Rois, that the sky was red, and that I was sure there was a great fire somewhere. You maintained that it was some heath burning; but I knew very well that there were no heaths on that side of the country. Look there; I am not dreaming! The château, the farm, everything is destroyed! But, Rose! and can Rose be——O heaven! And Madame Marcelle! and my little Edward! and that old man Bricolin! O heaven! Good heaven!"

And the Miller whipping his horse furiously, put it into a gallop in the direction of Blanchemont, without distressing himself whether his old Sophia was able to follow or not.

In proportion as they approached, the indications of the calamity became more convincing. They were soon apprised of it from the mouths of the passer-by, and although they were assured that no one had perished, yet both of them, pale

and fearfully oppressed, quickened the pace of the horse which carried them, whose speed was far too slow for their anxiety.

On arriving at the bottom of the hill, as the poor animal, breathless and covered with foam could only creep up the ascent step by step, they stopped him in front of Piaulette's cottage, and leaped from the cabriolet that they might hurry on more quickly. At the same moment, Marcelle coming out of the cottage appeared before them. She was pale but calm, and her dress bore no trace of injury from the fire. Occupied the whole night in her cares for others, she had not devoted herself to useless attempts to quench the fire. On seeing her Lemor almost fainted for joy, and he took her hand without having the power to utter a syllable.

"My son is here, and Rose is at the house of the cure!" said Marcelle, "she has not experienced any injury, she is much better in health, notwithstanding the alarm of her relatives. There is no greater evil in all than the loss of money, and that is but a trifling thing compared with the happiness which awaits her."

"What are you speaking of?" said the Miller; "I do not understand you."

"Go and see, my friend, there is nothing to prevent you, and learn from her own lips that which I do not wish to be the first to tell you."

Grand-Louis hastened away in a state of extreme bewilderment, while Lemor entered the cottage with Marcelle, and while Piaulette and her husband were engaged in attending to the horses, he ran towards the bed in which Edward was sleeping. The last of the race of the Blanchemonts was tranquilly reposing on the truckle bed of the poorest peasant of their domains. He no longer possessed the shelter of even a night's lodging as his own right, and the hospitality of indigence was the only resource which he could at that moment claim.

"He has not then encountered any danger?" said Lemor, kissing his little hands, moist with a gentle heat.

"This little creature is of a happy temper," said Marcelle, with a certain degree of pride; "he had not suffered any injury, and though he was awakened in the midst of suffocating smoke, he was not frightened. He has passed the night endeavouring with me to support and console the sufferers; finding, notwithstanding his weakness and his inability to comprehend their misfortune, attentions, caresses, and expressions of angelic simplicity, both for me and the sinking beings trembling and weeping around us. And I who feared the effect of alarm and emotion on his health! This feeble body encloses a heroic soul. Lemor, this is a blessed child whom God has marked at his birth to show how a poor man may also be a noble one!"

The caresses of Lemor awoke the child, and he recognised

him rather by the manifestation of his affection than from his features.

"Oh! Henry," said he, "and why would not you speak to me when you were pretending to be Antoine?"

Marcelle had begun to explain with stoicism to her lover, the new disaster by which this conflagration had happened to the remainder of her fortune, when M. Bricolin, his countenance in the wildest agitation, his clothes torn into shreds, and his hands covered with burns, entered the cottage.

The first emotions of his terror having subsided, the farmer had laboured with energy and all the courage of desperation to save his cattle and the produce of his harvest. A hundred times he had been within a hair's breadth of falling a victim to his own furious recklessness, and he had not renounced his fruitless hopes of saving his property, until he saw himself in the midst of a heap of ruins. Then it was that discouragement, despair, and a sort of fury seized upon his luckless brain. It seemed as if he had become insane, and he came rushing towards Marcelle with a strange and bewildered air, his ideas confused, and his words incoherent and embarrassed.

"Ah, I find you at last, madam!" said he, in a choking and almost inarticulate voice, "I have been looking for you all over the village, and I did not know what could have become of you. Listen, listen! Madame Marcelle! What I have to say to you is of the greatest consequence. It is very fine for you to be so composed, but all this misfortune falls upon you, and the entire loss on your part!"

"I know it, M. Bricolin," replied Marcelle, not without a little impatience.

The sight of this avaricious man was not consolatory to her feelings at that moment.

"You know it!" replied Bricolin, with a sort of passion, "and I know it also! You will have to rebuild the premises, and replace the cattle of Blanchemont."

"And with what if you please, M. Bricolin?"

"With your own money. Have you not got the money? Have I not given you enough?"

"I have it no longer, M. Bricolin. The pocket-book was burnt."

"You have left my pocket-book to be burnt! The pocket-book which I entrusted to you!" exclaimed Bricolin highly exasperated, and striking his forehead with his hand. "What! have you been mad enough, stupid enough, not to save the pocket-book when you had plenty of time to save your son!"

"I saved Rose also, M. Bricolin. It was I who carried her out of the house in my arms. During that time the pocket-book was burnt, and I do not regret it."

"That is not true, you have it still!"

"I swear that I have not. Not only the desk in which it was placed, but all the furniture of the room was burnt while the family were being saved. You are already acquainted with

this, I told you of it before, for you questioned me upon it, but either you did not hear me or you do not remember."

"Ah! it was so, I recollect," said the farmer in consternation, "but I thought you were deceiving me."

"And why should I deceive you? Was not that money mine?"

"Yours! You do not then deny that I bought your estate last night, that I paid you for it, and that it now belongs to me?"

"How could the thought arise, that I should be capable of denying it?"

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me, madam! I am not in possession of my senses!" said the farmer, calmed and subdued.

"I see that plainly," said Marcelle, in a tone of contempt which he did not even perceive.

"That makes no difference; the repairs of the buildings and the replacing of the cattle are your affair," replied he after a short silence, during which his ideas had again fallen into fresh confusion.

"One of two things is certain, M. Bricolin," said Marcelle, shrugging her shoulders; "either you have not bought the estate and I must repair the injury, or I have sold it to you and it is no longer any concern of mine. Make your own choice."

"That is true!" said Bricolin, again falling into a stupor.

Afterwards he hastily resumed—

"Oh, I bought it of you thoroughly, and paid for it finely too, you cannot deny that! I have your own deed which testifies to the receipt of the money. I did not leave that to be burnt. My wife has it in her pocket."

"In that case you may rest in peace, and I can do the same, for I also have the duplicate of the deed in my own pocket."

"But you ought to bear the loss!" exclaimed Bricolin, in a species of moody passion, "I did not buy an estate of you without buildings and without cattle. Here is a loss of fifty thousand francs at the very least."

"I know nothing about that, but it is certain that this misfortune took place after the sale."

"It was you who set the place on fire!"

"That is very probable!" said Marcelle with cool contempt, "and I have thrown the price of my estate into it by way of amusement."

"Forgive me! forgive me! I am ill!" said the farmer, "to lose so much money in one night! But it is all the same, Madame Marcelle, you must indemnify me for this calamity. I have always had some misfortune or another with your family. My father was put to the torture by the *chauffeurs*, for a deposit which was placed in his hands by your grandfather, and in addition to that, suffered the loss of fifty thousand francs which were his own."

"The consequences of that misfortune are irreparable, since

your father lost health both of mind and body. But my family are wholly innocent of the crime of those robbers; and as to the loss of your money, that was entirely compensated for by my grandfather."

"That is true, he was a worthy master; so, then, you ought to do as he did, you ought to indemnify me for this loss."

"You are so much attached to money, and I care for it so little, that I would satisfy you if I had it in my power to do so. But you forgot that I have lost my all even to the miserable sum of two thousand francs, which I had raised from the sale of my carriage—nay, even to my very clothes and linen. My son cannot even say that he owns so much in the world, even as the clothes which cover him, for I carried him naked out of your house, and if this woman had not welcomed him with a sublime charity, and covered him with the humble clothing of one of her own children, I should have been forced to ask of you the alms of a blouse and a pair of *sabots* for him. Leave me, then, in peace, I beseech you. I have strength to support my misfortune, but your rapacity excites my indignation, and fatigues me."

"This is sufficient, sir," said Lemor, who could no longer contain himself. "Retire, and leave this lady in peace."

Bricolin did not hear this apostrophe. He had dropped into a chair, convinced of the total destitution of Marcelle, and of her perfect inability to comply with the exactions that he had dared to hope to extort.

"And so," he exclaimed in despair, striking his clenched fist upon the table, "I believed that I had made a good bargain last night; I had bought Blanchemont for two hundred and fifty thousand francs, and this morning, I find myself with a loss of fifty thousand francs in building and cattle. And that," said he, with a deep groan, "brings the price of the estate up to three hundred thousand francs, which was what you first demanded."

"It does not appear to me that this ought to be considered any fault of mine any more than it is any profit to me," said Marcelle, coldly, her indignation subsiding as she saw that of Lemor arise, who at the same time was trying to suppress it, anxiously endeavouring to keep himself within the bounds of moderation.

"Are you the only person that is unfortunate, then, M. Bricolin?" said Piaulette, with simplicity, wondering at all she heard. "Truly, I cannot comprehend all this. This poor lady has lost her all; you are still rich, as rich as you were last night, and yet you are coming upon her with fresh demands. That is droll enough. If in spite of this misfortune, you get Blanchemont for as little as three hundred thousand francs, it is still a very pretty bargain. I know very well that there are other people who would have given more."

"What is that you say?" replied Bricolin. "Hold your tongue; you are nothing better than a fool and a gossip."

"Thanks, sir," said Piaulette.

And turning round with energy towards Marcelle—

"It is all the same, madam," said she; "since you have lost everything, you are welcome to stop here with me as long as you please, and take your share of our black bread. I shall never reproach you with it or look for any return."

"Listen to her, sir," said Lemor, "and blush!"

"As for you, I don't know who you are!" replied Bricolin, furiously, "nobody here knows you. You have as much the look of a miller as I have of a bishop. But you shall not go very far, my boy; I shall point you out to the gendarmes, that they may demand your papers, and if you have not got them we shall see. My house has been set on fire through malice, that is plain euough, all the world can prove that, and the *procureur du roi* is ready to commence the process. You are very often with a man who bears me ill-will, and that is quite sufficient."

"It is too much!" said Lemor, with indignation; "you are one of the basest of wretches, and if you do not leave this place I know very well how to compel you."

"Stay!" said Marcelle, seizing Lemor's arm. "Have pity on this man, he has lost his reason. Be merciful to his misfortune, however base he may show himself to be. Follow my example, Lemor; my patience is equal to the necessities of my situation."

Bricolin heard not. He held his head between his hands and groaned like a mother who has lost her child.

"And I who would never insure because it was so expensive! he exclaimed in a lamentable tone, "and my cattle, my poor cattle, that were so beautiful and so fat! There was one lot of sheep worth two thousand francs, and which I would not sell at the fair of Saint Christophe!"

Marcelle could not keep herself from smiling, and her high-mindedness taught Lemor to control his own indignation.

"It is all the same," said the farmer, rising suddenly; "your miller shall not have my daughter!"

"In that case, neither shall you have my estate; the deed is plain, and that condition a formal stipulation."

"We will try that at law."

"Whenever you please."

"Oh, you know you cannot go to law on your side. It is necessary to have money for that, and you have none. And then you must make restitution of the payment, and how can you do that? Besides, the pretty condition which you exacted is good for nothing; and then as for your miller, I am going to begin by having him arrested and led to prison, for it is he, I am sure, who has set my house on fire, out of revenge for my having driven him out of it last night. The whole village can serve as witnesses of the threats he made. And as for this gentleman here—enough! Here! here, you gendarme!" and he rushed out of the cottage a prey to real delirium.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE CHAPEL.

ANXIOUS for the Miller and Lemor, whom the blind vengeance of the farmer might draw into a business, if not serious at least disagreeable, Marcelle required from her lover that he should conceal himself, and Piaulette was on the point of leaving the cottage to warn Grand-Louis and induce him to follow the same course, when she observed the crowd of people scattered over the little hill, collect together and hurry towards the farm.

"I am sure it is already done!" exclaimed Piaulette, in tears. "They have already laid hands upon Grand-Louis."

Lemor, influenced only by his courage and his friendship, left the cottage and darted towards the little hill. Marcelle followed him in alarm, leaving Edward under the care of the eldest child of her hostess.

On entering the court-yard of the farm, Marcelle and Lemor saw with affright the black and scattered ruins, the ground covered with streams of water, and resembling a lake of ink; the crowd of exhausted workmen, wet, burnt, and looking like spectres, and who were preparing themselves for new toils. The flames had just shown themselves in a little isolated chapel which was situated between the farm and the old château.

This new accident appeared incomprehensible, as that erection had remained untouched and in safety until then, and if a spark of fire had fallen within it while the conflagration was raging, it could not have remained latent for so long a time in the midst of a quantity of the dried stalks of peas of which that place had been made the receptacle. The fire, however, certainly rose from the interior as if some implacable hand had pushed its audacity so far, as to determine under the eyes of the whole assemblage, and in broad day, utterly to destroy the very last building left on the estate.

"Leave the chapel to burn!" exclaimed M. Bricolin, foaming with rage; "run after the incendiary! he must be very near, he cannot have got far! I am certain it is Grand-Louis! I possess the proofs! Search the warren! Here, in the warren!"

M. Bricolin was perfectly ignorant that while he was thus directing public feeling against the Miller, the latter, forgetful of everything, and knowing as little of what was passing without, was then at the parsonage, on his knees before the

arm-chair on which Rose had been laid, and receiving from her own lips the confession of her love and the news of the contract into which her father had entered.

In the general disorder, the curé and even his servants were mixed up with the eager workmen. The grandmother Bricolin was the only person who remained near Rose, and the young lovers, plunged in an intoxication of the purest nature, thought no more of the events which were being transacted around them.

A circle had formed itself around the chapel, and the pipes of the engine had been arranged to send its streams of water over it, when M. Bricolin, who had advanced up to the arched entrance of the door, recoiled with horror, and fell upon one of his farming-men, who was scarcely able to support his weight. This chapel, which in olden times had been attached to the château, still displayed to the eyes of the antiquary numberless beautiful details of Gothic sculpture. The very antiquity of the building made it soon give way to the intensity of the heat. The flame was bursting through the windows, and the delicate architectural ornaments of carved roses began to detach themselves with a cracking noise, when the half-open door was suddenly opened from the inside. Then it was that they saw the lunatic emerge from within, a little lantern in one hand and a wisp of burning straw in the other. She withdrew slowly after having given the finishing stroke to her work of destruction, walking with an air of gravity, her eyes fixed upon the ground, seeing no one, and wholly engrossed with the pleasure of her long meditated and coolly executed vengeance.

A gendarme, too undiscriminating in the discharge of his duty, marched directly up to her and arrested her steps, seizing her by the arm. The idiot then perceived that she was encircled by the crowd, and suddenly brandishing her firebrand in the face of the gendarme, in the surprise of that unforeseen species of defence, he was compelled to relinquish his hold. Then it was that Bricoline, recovering all her impetuous agility, and assuming an expression of hatred and fury, darted into the chapel as if to shut herself up within it, pouring out upon them a confusion of imprecations.

An attempt was made to follow her, but was abandoned for want of courage. She ran through the burning flames with the nimbleness of a salamander, and ascended the little spiral staircase which conducted to the roof. Then, showing herself at one of the windows, they saw her rousing the fire, which rose too slowly to gratify her desire, and which very soon surrounded her on every side. A vain attempt was made to wet the roof by directing the play of the engines over it, but it had been recently repaired and covered with zinc, and the water rolled off without penetrating into it. The fire soon filled the interior of the building, and the unfortunate Bricoline, slowly consuming, must have endured the most fearful

tortures. But she did not appear even to feel them, and they heard her sing the air of a dance which she loved in her youth, and to which she had doubtless often danced with her lover, and which returned to her memory at the moment of death. Not a single complaint dropped from her lips. Deaf to the cries and supplications of her mother, who wrung her hands and whom they held by force to hinder her from rushing to join her, she continued singing for a long space of time; afterwards appearing once again at the window, she recognised her father.

"Ah! M. Bricolin," she cried, addressing herself to him, "this is a fine time for you this *jour d'aujourd'hui.*"

These were her last words. When they had mastered the conflagration, they found her calcined bones upon the pavement of the chapel.

This frightful death completed Bricolin's bewilderment of mind, and broke down the courage of his wife. They no longer thought of arresting any one, and during the remainder of the day Rose and her grandmother were completely forgotten by them. Shut up together at the house of the curé, M. and Madame Bricolin would see no one, and they did not leave the place until they had exhausted together the first bitterness of their sorrow.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

MARCELLE'S presence of mind had enabled her to foresee that Rose, ill and spirit-broken with so much emotion, could not be made acquainted with the deplorable end of her sister without danger. She had suggested to the Miller to hurry her into the lawyer's cabriolet and take her to the mill, together with her grandmother and the infirm old man, from whom the good woman would never separate herself. Marcelle herself, leaning on the arm of Lemor, who carried Edward in his arms, followed immediately behind.

During some of the following days Rose was visited every night with severe attacks of fever. Her friends never left her for an instant, and having succeeded in concealing from her the spectacle of the mendicant Cadoche's funeral, whom they carried to his grave with all the state and ceremony he had exacted, they kept her in ignorance of the lunatic's death until she was in a state to support such intelligence better, but for a long time after she knew nothing of the frightful circumstances, through the agency of which it had been accomplished.

Marcelle consulted M. Taillard on the value of the deed she had executed with Bricolin. The opinion of the lawyer was unfavourable. Marriage being *d'ordre public*, could not be inserted as a clause in a sale of property. In cases where illegal clauses are introduced the sale remains valid, but the clauses are nullified and considered as not to exist. Such are the regulations of the law, and M. Bricolin was perfectly acquainted with them before the signing of the agreement.

At the end of three days the farmer was seen to arrive at the mill, pale, worn down, thinner by one-half than before, having lost almost the very desire of drinking to cheer his heart. He appeared even too depressed for passion, yet, as they were ignorant with what intentions he came to Angibault, Marcelle, knowing that Rose was still much enfeebled, trembled lest he should have come to reclaim her with angry words and outrageousness of manner. Every one felt anxious, and they went out in a body to meet him, to prevent him from entering unless he avowed that his intentions were peaceful.

He began by coldly intimating to his mother his command, that she should bring back his daughter to him as quickly as possible. He had engaged a house in the town of Blanchemont, and had commenced the work of rebuilding.

"But if I am badly lodged," said he, "that is no reason why I should be deprived of the society of my daughter, or that she should refuse the attention due from her to her mother, as that would be the conduct of an unnatural child."

While speaking thus, Bricolin darted a ferocious look at the Miller. They saw clearly that he wished to take his daughter away with him, without provoking any disagreeable incident, reserving the power of giving loose to his rancour at some after period, when he might accuse Grand-Louis with having wished to carry off his daughter.

"That is right! that is right!" said his mother, who charged herself with the duty of replying; "Rose has been asking to return to her father and mother for a long time, but as she is still so ill we have been obliged to prevent her. I think that to-day she may be in a state to follow you, and I am ready to accompany you with my old man, if you have accommodation to lodge us. Only allow Madame Marcelle the time to prepare the little one for the pleasure and the agitation of seeing you again. For my own part, I have something particular to say to you, Bricolin; so come into my chamber."

The old woman conducted him into the apartment which she shared with the Miller's mother. Marcelle and Rose had been installed in that of the Miller. Lemor, and Grand-Louis slept in the hayloft.

"Bricolin," said the old woman, "you are going to great expense in this rebuilding, where will you get the money?"

"What is that to you, mother? You have none to give me," replied Bricolin, in a surly tone, "I am straitened, it is true, at this moment, but I must borrow. I shall not be embarrassed how to find credit."

"Yes, but with the great interest which is always exacted, and then when you will be obliged to pay it back, you will have launched into fresh and inevitable expenses, and you will find this debt such a trouble, such an encumbrance, that I scarcely see how you will get out of it."

"Ah, well! and what would you wish me to do? Do you suppose that I can shut up my crops in my wooden shoes next year, and put my cattle under the shelter of a broom?"

"But what will all this cost, then?"

"Heaven only knows!"

"Say something near."

"From forty five to fifty thousand francs at the least. Fifteen to eighteen thousand francs for the buildings, as much for the cattle, and as much for the loss of my crops, and the profits of the year."

"Yes, that makes fifty thousand francs. That is exactly what I calculated. Ah, well! tell me, then, Bricolin, if I were to give you them, what would you do for me?"

"You!" exclaimed Bricolin, whose eyes rekindled with their accustomed fire. "Have you then some savings which you have kept hidden from me, or are you doting?"

"I am not doting. I have fifty thousand francs in gold, which I will give you, if you will leave me to marry Rose according to my own will."

"Ah! there again! everlastingly the Miller! All the women are mad about that bear, even the old ones of eighty years of age."

"That's right! that's right; just as much as you like, only accept my offer."

"And where is this money?"

"I have given it to Grand-Louis to take care of," said the old woman, who knew that her son was capable of tearing it from her by force in some moment of intoxication, if he should happen to see it in her possession.

"And why to Grand-Louis, and not to me or to my wife? You wish then to make him a present of it, if I do not act according to your will?"

"The money of another is safe in his hands," said the old woman, "for he had this of mine in his power all unknown to me, and he brought it to me when I supposed that it was lost for ever. It is my husband's, you must understand, but since you have interdicted him from acting by a commission of lunacy, and as we have, according to the ancient law, fully endowed each other with our goods, for the benefit of the longer liver, it is at my disposal."

"But is this then a sum which you have recovered? It is impossible! You are only amusing yourself at my expense, and it is very kind of me to listen to you."

"Listen!" said the Mother Bricolin: "it is altogether a strange history."

And she recounted to her son the whole history of Cadoche, and his bequest.

"And the Miller brought that money to you when he had no occasion to say anything about it!" exclaimed the farmer, in amazement; "that was very honest, and very handsome, too, on his part. We must make him some recompense."

"There is but one recompense that we can make him, and that is the hand of Rose, since she has already made him a present of her heart."

"But I will not give him any dowry!" exclaimed Bricolin.

"You need not say a word about that; who mentioned such a thing?"

"Let me see this money, then."

The grandmother Bricolin conducted her son to the Miller, who showed him the iron pot and its contents.

"And in this way," said the farmer, dazzled, and as if resuscitated by the sight of so much golden treasure, "Madame de Blanchemont is not reduced to absolute poverty?"

"No, thanks to God!"

"And to you, Grand-Louis."

"Thanks to the whim of Father Cadoche."

"And you—what do you inherit?"

"Three thousand francs; of which one third is destined for Piaulette, and the remainder for the establishment of two other families near me. We shall work all together, and be associated in the profits."

"That is a stupid arrangement."

"No, it is just and useful."

"But why not keep these three thousand crowns for wedding presents for your wife?"

"They would smell of theft. And then—supposing that they were only the produce of charity, would you, who are so proud, wish that Rose should have upon her person dresses paid for with the small coin of the country, given in charity to a beggar?"

"We should not be obliged to tell how they had been provided. Ah! well—and when is the wedding to be, Grand-Louis?"

"To-morrow, if you will."

"Publish the banns to-morrow; and place the money in my hands to-day, for I am in want of it."

"No, no!" exclaimed the old woman; "you shall have it on the wedding-day. You shall have it! You shall have it, my boy!"

The sight of the gold had reanimated M. Bricolin. He placed himself at the table, touched glasses with the Miller, embraced his daughter, and remounted his pony, just midway between sobriety and intoxication.

"Managing matters thus," he said to himself with a smile, "I shall still have Blanchemont for two hundred and fifty thousand francs; ay, even for two hundred thousand francs, since I give no portion to my youngest daughter."

"And we, too, Lemor—we must begin to build," said Marcelle to her lover, when Bricolin had departed. "We are still rich. We have sufficient to erect a pretty rustic cottage, where *our* child shall receive a good education, for you will be his preceptor, and the Miller will teach him his own occupation. For what reason may he not, at the same time, be a laborious workman and an educated man?"

"I intend rather to begin with myself," said Lemor; "I am but an ignorant man, and I must instruct myself during our evening meetings. I am now a miller's man; the condition pleases me, and I shall keep to it as my daily occupation. What excellent health such a mode of life as this will bring our Edward!"

"Ah! well, Madame Marcelle," said Grand-Louis, taking the hand of Lemor; "you, who told me the first time that you came here—it is just eight days since, and neither more nor less, that your happiness would be to have a neat little cottage with a thatched roof, covered all over with the green branches of the vine, just in the same way as mine; in leading a life, simple, and not too much restrained, like mine; in having a son, with sufficient occupation, and not too stupid, like me—

all this you have here, on the margin of our river of Vauvre, which has the honour of pleasing you, and by the side of such excellent neighbours as ourselves."

"And with all things in common," said Marcelle; "for I will not hear of it otherwise."

"Oh, that is impossible! your portion now is much greater than mine."

"You calculate badly, Miller," said Lemor. "'Thine' and 'mine' between friends is as much an enormity as reckoning that two and two make five."

"Behold me then rich and learned!" replied the Miller; "for I have got Rose's heart, and I shall have you to talk to every day. Did I not tell you, M. Lemor, that a miracle would be worked for me, and that all would turn out well? I did not reckon, however, upon Uncle Cadoche."

"Why are you dancing about in that way, *alochon?*" said Edward.

"The reason is, my child," replied the Miller, lifting him up in his arms, "that, in throwing my nets, I have fished up, in the clearest water, a little angel who has brought me happiness, and in the most troubled, an old wretch of an uncle, whom I may perhaps succeed in getting out of purgatory!"

THE END.

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